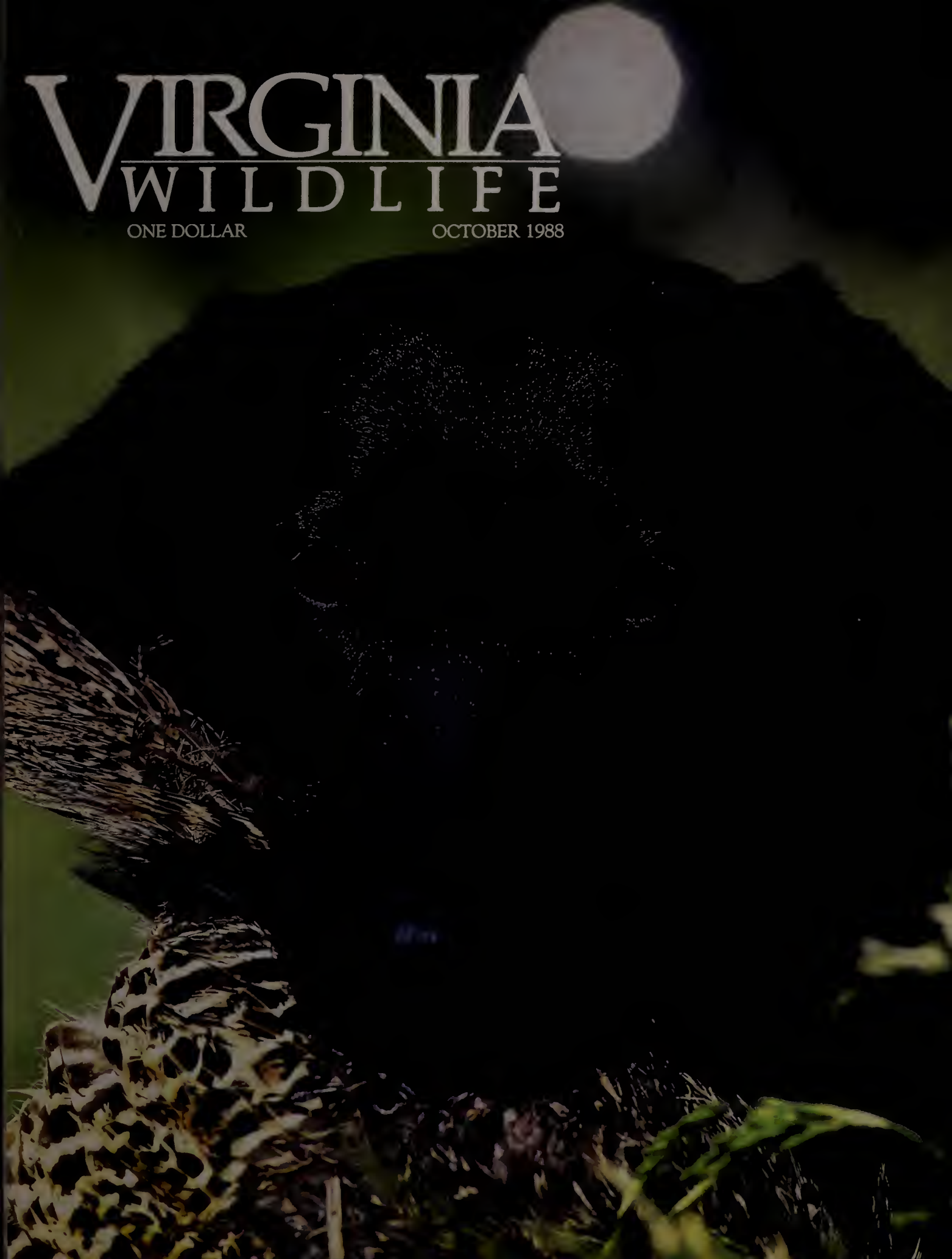
VIRGINIA WILDLIFE

ONE DOLLAR

OCTOBER 1988



Editor's Page

O.K., I admit it. It was a shock to buy my new hunting license last month. I was getting ready to buy both the small game and big game licenses plus a national forest stamp, and my pen hesitated on the check while I flipped to check the balance in my account. It's not that $27 is all that much money; it's just that most of us never figured that the price of hunting and fishing licenses would ever be something you had to plan to keep enough money in your checkbook for. And, this is from a person who lived through last year's General Assembly, one who heard all the talk around the office of the need for more money, and the "what if" scenario if the bucks didn't come through. I knew the facts and I supported the increase, and not just because I work for the Game Department. Well, I take that back. Because I do work for the Game Department, I have seen firsthand what license money combined with funds from the federal excise tax on hunting and fishing equipment has done in this state, and I don't need anybody telling me anything more to convince me that we're doing something vitally important for wildlife in Virginia.

Still, some nine months have passed since the thought of the price of a hunting or fishing license entered my mind, and I'll admit, when I was reminded of the increase, I gave it one of those "Oh well's," like you do when you know something has happened that you can't do a whole lot about, and you resign yourself to it. And, as I was "wallering" in self-pity because I hardly had enough money left to buy the necessary four boxes of 8's that I needed for Opening Day, a little voice whispered, "We *aren't* acting a bit spoiled, and (dare we admit) *selfish* are we??" Of course I was. And all I needed was to remember the purpose of this money, and I snapped right out of it.

Truly, our hunting and fishing licenses are most wonderful things. These are not DMV tags costing way too much (and which are updated for a cool 20 bucks each year) that you pay for and never have any idea of where or how your money was spent. *Our* hunting and fishing licenses are all used for the benefit of that which we care most about. *Guaranteed.* For example: We all know that the federal duck stamp was recently hiked up to $10. Know how much of it goes to administrative paper-shuffling? $1. Period. The Feds can't take any more than that (though I bet it's just about to kill them not to). Know how much of the rest is spent to acquire and develop critical waterfowl refuges? Nine bucks of *our* money. That's right. And that has added up to over 300 million dollars since 1934 and helped preserve some 3.5 million acres of wetlands.

Yeah, I know, we duck hunters are *required* to buy these duck stamps, and some people don't like us patting ourselves on the back too much because it's not voluntary—*but*, do you know who pushed for 'em in the first place, way back in the late '20s? You got it. Us. We knew that waterfowl were in trouble, bad trouble, and the Feds had already cut the season on us drastically. So, what did we do? We gave 'em money to give ducks refuge from us and everybody else, including developers and farmers, who wanted to take their living and resting spaces from them.

And this is the kind of thing we just have to remember these days, because it took alot of heartache and time and sacrifice and hard work to get these money-raising gimmicks called licenses and stamps in place. And at the time, some of those hard fighting conservationists-turned-politicians thought it was almost too late, that perhaps the wildlife of the country would never recover from the damage we humans had inflicted upon it.

But, we've got some success stories, some wonderful ones, and they can be traced right back to the sportsman's money. And, today it's even more important to stand behind wildlife with our pocketbooks. Because, it is not all good and the fight is far from over.

There is the waterfowl situation that is bad enough to make some of us ready to go out with our shotguns loaded with No. 4 steel shot and lay down in front of those bulldozers poised to plow through a wetland. The waterfowl seasons have been cut this year, just as severely as they were when sportsmen got so alarmed in the 1920s and demanded Congress to pass the Migratory Waterfowl Conservation Act and the accompanying duck stamp which paid for the acquisition of waterfowl refuges. And, even though we know that the problem isn't hunting, it's still our responsibility, 'cause some way or another, directly or indirectly, we're taking their habitat from them by draining, filling, and polluting 500,000 acres of wetlands per year. And not one of us is blameless for it.

The 10 bucks we give for a duck stamp may not be enough, but still, we've got to start somewhere. Oh, we can moan and groan over the lack of ducks and pricey hunting licenses, and we can snottily refuse to even be a part of it this year, but we've got a better heritage than that. Besides, our love for wildlife is stronger than any spoiled nature of ours anyway, and we don't want to lose it, no matter how much we scream "poor." It's all a matter of priorities in the end, and we know it.

I just hope that we don't sulk too long. There's too much at stake, and I'm hoping that instead we'll get on with what we can do. And then do more.

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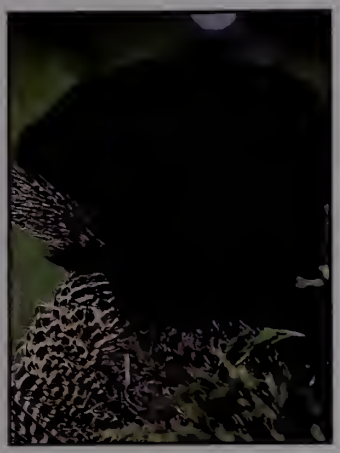

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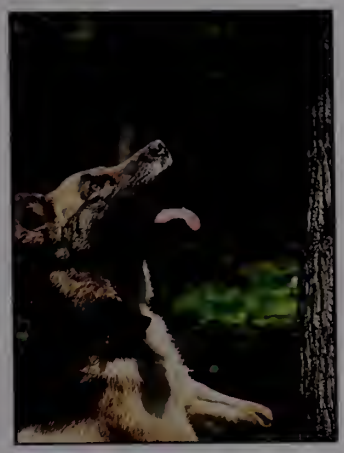

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Dedicated to the Conservation of Virginia's Wildlife and Related Natural Resources

Barking After Bushytails

There's another way to hunt squirrels this season—with a barking dog.

story & photos by Bruce Ingram

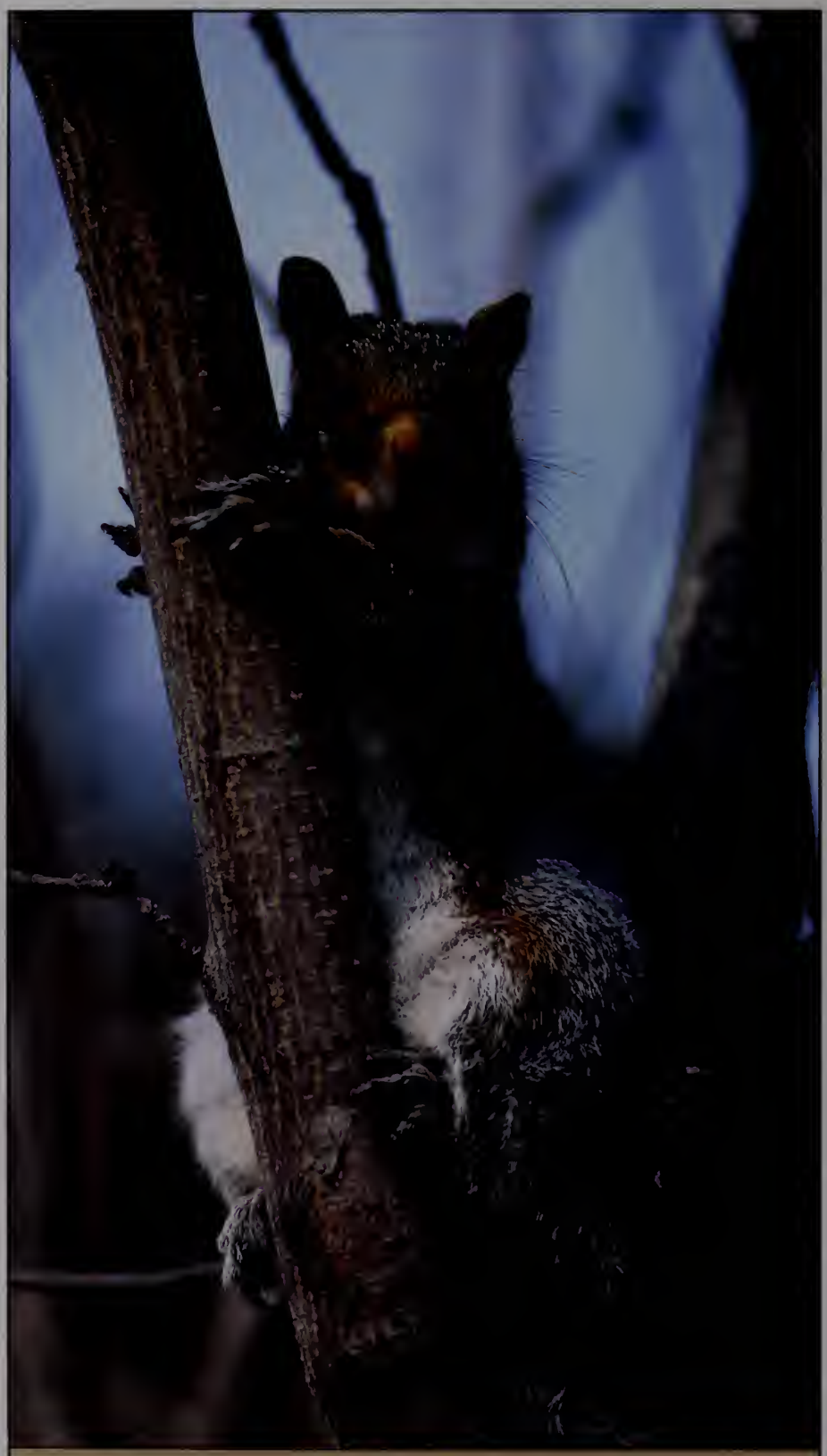
I can't remember what was more confusing—the barking of the gray squirrel, the yelping of the dog, or the yelling of my friend as he ordered me to get into position. It was my first squirrel hunt with a dog and, quite frankly, I wasn't sure what "getting into position" meant. When one's senses are bombarded with the blur of a racing bushytail—a canine hot on its tail—and with the screams of an excited human, it's easy to become a little unsettled.

After some illustrative gestures by my friend, I finally had enough sense to move to the side of the white oak—diagonally across from him—the same oak that the howling dog was literally trying to climb up into to get at its quarry. And while the dog was distracting the silvertail, my friend was at last able to squeeze off a good shot. Though I finally maneuvered into position, I never stopped gawking at the entire spectacle.

After all, isn't squirrel hunting supposed to be a thinking man's pastime—one in which you either walk quietly and slowly through the forest or sit motionless for hours in an oak glade? Well, maybe not. Squirrel hunting with dogs is another way to pursue Virginia's most popular small game species. It is also one of the most underutilized ways in which a sportsman can hunt game with a dog. Whereas volumes have been penned about the virtues of gun dogs for grouse, quail, rabbits, bears and raccoons, little has been written about the ultimate squirrel dog.

In fact, while doing research for this story, I found that few Old Dominion outdoorsmen practice this method of hunting squirrels. Donnie Barger, a 16-year-old squirrel hunter from Buchanan, is one of the few that does.

" 'It's hard to find people anymore who raise dogs specifically for squirrel hunting.' "



Hunting squirrels with a well-trained dog can simply add to the pleasure of hunting.

"It's hard to find people anymore who raise dogs specifically for squirrel hunting," said Barger who is a junior at James River High School. "If you look in *Squirrel Hunter Magazine*, you will rarely find anybody from Virginia who is training and selling dogs. My dad and I had to go all the way to West Virginia to get the dog we have now."

Barger and his dad are carrying on the sporting tradition of squirrel hunting with dogs. "It's so exciting the first time that you see a young pup look up into a tree when it spots movement," says Barger. "You know, then, that the dog has a chance at making a fine squirrel dog."

If a young dog has the inclination to scan the trees for movement (and there is no downplaying the importance of this instinct), the next step in the training process is to take the pup on a hunt with a veteran canine. Once the older dog trees a squirrel, the youngsters are allowed to move in, too, in order to get a feel for the action. Many veteran squirrel dog handlers, when it comes time to shoot, will use only .22 shorts. Otherwise, the theory goes, a young dog may become gun-shy and shy away from a tree when the moment of decision comes.

If pups show little interest in following an older dog to a tree, then it's back to the backyard. Barger likes to drag squirrel hides across his yard and then place the hide and rope up in a tree. This method will get the budding squirrelers used to the bushytail's scent, and reinforce that need to always be looking up. The final step in the training regimen is a very difficult one.

"The last thing you have got to teach your dog is not to fetch the squirrel," says Donnie Barger. "This is very different from a bird dog's training. Because, if a squirrel dog catches up to a squirrel, he is going to eat it for sure. Sometimes you will even have to race your dog, after a squirrel has been shot, to see who gets there first.
"On the other hand, you don't want to train the natural aggressiveness out of your dog or the desire to chase after squirrels. Some people like to leash their dogs right before they shoot a squirrel. But I don't like to do that. I

want my dog to be able to chase after a squirrel if it jumps from a tree before I shoot. And I always want a dog to be chomping at the bit and ready to go after that next squirrel."

A major difference between squirrel dogs and other gun dogs is that a squirrel dog is almost always a mixed breed. Sometimes, if a pooch's parentage is extremely doubtful, it is simply labelled a mountain cur. Donnie Barger's dog goes under that generic term, being part German shepherd, part elkhound, and "a whole lot of other things." Some veteran hunters also like what is known as a fyce. Fyces usually have quite a bit of rat terrier in them, and are famous for their aggressive pursuit of silvertails.

Just as there is constant argument among setter, pointer, and Brittany enthusiasts over which breed makes the best bird dog, squirrel dog fans can debate for hours over which of their canines is superior. A current argument, for example, is whether a mountain cur or fyce is superior.

Many mountain curs are known to be sight dogs. That is, they tree by sight and not by smell. The advantage here is that they will literally not be barking up the wrong tree. Another trait of this breed is that they do not generally bark until they tree their quarry. This allows the hunter to stay in one spot and wait until he hears the high pitched yelps of his cur.

Fyce followers acknowledge the virtues of those traits, but believe no dog can match the aggressiveness of their dogs. A fyce, also spelled *feist*, is virtually unmatched in its dogged (pardon the pun) pursuit of a fox or gray squirrel.

Of course, one matter that often stops all arguments is the difficulty in defining precisely what a mountain cur, fyce, or any other squirrel dog actually is. And what happens, for example, when you have a dog that appears to have characteristics of both mountain cur and fyce in its background?

On one matter, however, there is no disagreement, and that concerns the advantages of hunting bushytails with a dog.

Dwayne Clark and Donnie Barger wouldn't think about going squirrel hunting without their dog, Cookie.

"Our dog can easily cover a mile of woods in 15 minutes and not miss a squirrel in the process. A human could take hours to hunt that same bit of land."

Also, a dog's hearing is superior to a humans, which is a plus in hunting squirrels.

"Our dog will hear a squirrel's bark a ways off, go sneaking about for a few seconds, then take off like a bullet," says Barger's dad. "Meanwhile, we still haven't heard the squirrel yet. When we finally catch up to Cookie, she is four or five ridges away from where we were, and she has got a squirrel treed."

Virginia has both an early squirrel season in late September and early October, plus the regular one from early November through the end of January. Regardless of the time of year, a squirrel dog will give the Old Dominon sportsman an edge.

"In September, a good sight dog can really help you," says the older Barger. "The squirrels will be mostly up in the trees, and the dog will always be looking up to spot movement. But in the fall, I really think that is when a squirrel dog shines, especially after the deer season is over."

Dwayne Clark, an avid silvertail hunter from Botetourt County, gives further evidence of a dog's effectiveness.

"The best squirrel hunt I've ever had was with a dog," he says. "In an hour and a half, two other hunters and I were able to get a total of 16 squirrels. The day started out with the dog running four squirrels up the same tree, and things just kept getting better from then on. A dog does all the work for you; you just have to follow along behind."

Squirrel hunting with dogs is a part of Virginia's rich hunting past. Sadly, few state hunters today employ this approach. But those who do know that taking a dog afield after bushytails is a novel—and addictive—way to take squirrels. □

Bruce Ingram is the Virginia editor for Outdoor Life *magazine and a frequent contributor to* Virginia Wildlife.

Dogs are becoming the popular companions of fall turkey hunters in the Old Dominion.

A Nose for Turkeys

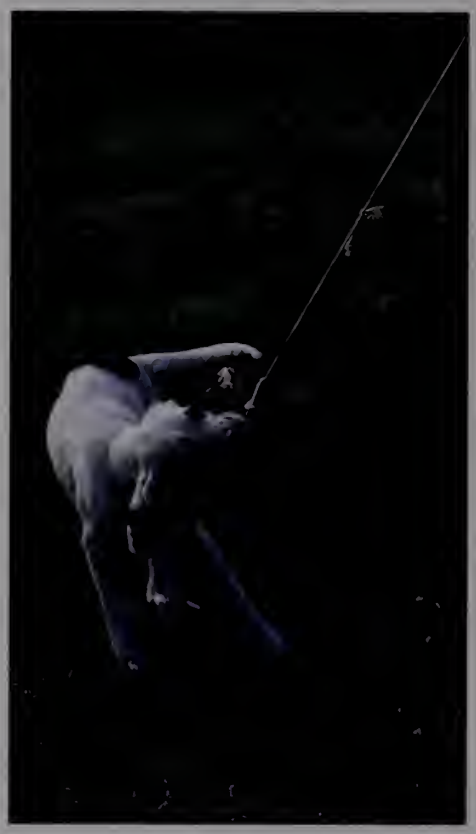
by Kit Shaffer

"What the heck is a wild turkey dog?" Hunters often think you are pulling their leg when you inform them that the canine in your pickup truck is a turkey dog. Most individuals can clearly relate to other breeds of hunting dogs, but turkey dogs, to the majority of hunters, have always been mysterious animals. They aren't rare and endangered species like the brown pelicans or the red-cockaded woodpeckers, but they are just about as difficult to locate and identify in many areas.

I first became acquainted with turkey hunting with dogs over four decades ago. At that time wild turkey populations were most numerous in the Piedmont section of the Old Dominion. In some counties, I discovered a few dedicated sportsmen who hunted wild turkeys with dogs. These rare animals had been bred and trained exclusively to assist in pursuing America's largest game bird. Their hunting techniques were unusual, most exciting and very effective. After their dogs located and scattered flocks of wild turkeys, the hunters built an elaborate blind and then, with their favorite animal beside them, attempted to call in those separated gobblers and hens. Incidently, these wild turkey enthusiasts invariably used the same type of caller—an unusual device made from the wing bone of a turkey, a rubber tube and a hollow cow horn.

It was unfortunate that through the years, most of those old-fashioned turkey dog enthusiasts passed away, carrying with them their unique hunting techniques.

However, a relatively few dedicated individuals in our state continued to breed and train turkey dogs, and thus perpetuated the method of fall turkey hunting with a capable canine. Today, with greatly increased wild turkey populations throughout Virginia, there has been a significant revival of interest in obtaining, breeding, training and hunting turkey dogs.



Above: Training a turkey dog takes some time, and starting early by introducing a pup to a turkey wing in the backyard is always a good beginning. Right: Turkey hunter Joe Hardy and Kit Shaffer's dog, Chris, once again show what fall turkey hunting is all about; photos by Janet Shaffer.

To fully comprehend the usefulness of a turkey dog, we must understand some of the innate characteristics of the remarkable wild turkey. During the fall and winter hunting seasons, wild turkeys are found in flocks or gangs. Ordinarily, the old mother hen and her family which she hatched successfully that spring will form the basic gang. It is not unusual that birds from other gangs, as well as unattached single gobblers and hens, will on occasions join these flocks. They daily range, feed and roost together.

Turkeys are extremely gregarious; whenever they are separated, they attempt to regroup immediately. The old hen is skillful in reassembling the flock by her calling. Whenever the gang is thoroughly scattered, she will invariably return to the exact spot from which her family had been flushed to begin rounding up her flock. Often when turkeys are flushed by hunters, they will fly off together, and since they are not scattered, they will not respond to calling. In direct contrast, when a fast dog chases the hens and gobblers, they usually run and fly frantically in every direction. This creates the perfect situation for hunters, allowing them to build their blinds, and by imitating the calls of the old hen, lure the flock back into shooting range.

Years ago, an editor of a sporting magazine asked me: "What are the duties and responsibilities of a wild turkey dog? What are the unusual characteristics of this beast?" Basically, these unique dogs should hunt far and wide in the big woods, searching exclusively for the big black birds. When they locate flocks of turkeys, they should rush into the gang, barking wildly, and scattering the individual birds in every direction. Then they are trained to lie motionless and quietly

in the blind while the hunter calls in the widely dispersed gobblers and hens. Should there be an unfortunate cripple, the dog will trail, locate and capture the bird.

What we are always searching for in a turkey dog is a canine that possesses some of the following: 1) a love for the hunt, 2) an excellent nose, 3) tremendous stamina, 4) the ability to cover a lot of territory, 5) uncontrolled barking when encountering turkeys (a turkey dog that won't bark is as handicapped as a Labrador retriever that can't swim, 6) a disregard of all game except turkeys while turkey hunting, 7) superior intelligence, 8) the ability to, after flushing turkeys, completely change characters and not move a muscle while turkeys are approaching the blind, and 9) a dog that obeys all commands. That's quite a challenging assignment for any animal; thus, it should be obvious why excellent turkey dogs are so rare and difficult to obtain and train.

What types of canines develop into the perfect "10's" or the superior turkey dog? Through the years, I have seen nearly every breed of hunting dogs used in flushing wild turkeys. Some were outstanding while others weren't worth a can of dog food. It is true that setters, pointers, spaniels, beagles, hounds, retrievers and crosses of some of all of the breeds listed have become superior turkey dogs. However, we never know what particular canine will miraculously develop into an excellent turkey hunter.

I have a friend in Nelson County who spent all last fall and winter attempting to train his registered and highly bred spaniel to chase turkeys. He invariably carried along in his truck his house pet, an Australian sheep dog. You might guess what happened. The spaniel failed completely, while the shaggy sheep dog immediately became a turkey hunting marvel. By the end of the season, this talented female had located and flushed 36 flocks of wild turkeys!

During recent years, a truly outstanding breed of dog, the Boykin spaniel has been introduced into the Old Dominion. They have made a significant impact on our turkey hunting dog fraternity. These medium-sized spaniels were developed years ago in South

Fall turkey hunting is a wonderful sport in itself, but add a good dog to it and not only will you gain a companion in the field, but you will undoubtedly reduce the loss of cripples and cover a whole lot more territory in one day; photo by William S. Lea.

Carolina to hunt and retrieve. Intelligent, easy to train, they dearly love to bark at and flush turkeys. Their size, coloration and temperament make them ideal companions for turkey blinds. I have had the privilege to hunt with friends who own Boykins, and have observed that the dogs are most enthusiastic and successful in their search for those large game birds.

I receive numerous calls and letters from hunters who are anxious to somehow obtain a trained wild turkey dog. Since canines skilled in the specialized sport of autumn-winter turkey hunting are relatively rare, and individuals who breed and train them are few and far between, this really isn't an option. An interested individual can attempt to locate a super turkey dog and then try to purchase it, but unless the sportsperson recently won the Irish Sweepstakes or has had a run of luck at Vegas, the cost would probably be prohibitive. Avid turkey hunters who are fortunate enough to own skilled dogs just do not sell them. It has been my observation that fanatic turkey dog owners would undoubtedly prefer to sell a member of their immediate family rather than part with their favorite hunting companion.

Should you be interested, your best bet would be to obtain a bird dog puppy possessing some of the essential traits which are necessary to hunt turkeys, and then attempt to train it yourself. If you should happen to obtain a young dog whose ancestors might have hunted turkeys, you possibly could strike gold! On a few occasions, I have observed a pup, accompanied by an older skilled dog, start hunting, flushing and barking at those big game birds from the very first encounter. Alert pups frequently learn to hunt by imitating the actions of older brace mates. For the best prospects, I recommend three-to-six-month-old bird dog pups. English and Irish setters, pointers, crosses of these and the spaniels (Springers, Brittanys or Boykins) usually can be obtained with some serious searching.

Training a young dog to hunt wild turkeys exclusively can be a time consuming, frustrating yet often rewarding experience. We prefer to start yard breaking a puppy while they are still naive and impressionable, but willing and anxious to learn. Anyone who has never had the pleasure of owning and developing a bird dog pup has missed one of life's delightful experiences. There surely are no animals any more affectionate or anxious to please. The trainer's main objective will be to relate to the young dogs exactly what is expected of them.

I have found that the ultimate basis of yard breaking is the fact that the pup likes to eat. Young dogs can eventually be taught to obey commands either by donating or withholding choice morsals of food.

One of the most essential training aids is a whistle. A puppy that won't respond to a whistle, call or command will not be worth much later in the turkey woods. Self-hunting dogs are worthless.

There are a number of simple words or commands which should be incorporated into your pup's vocabulary. The knowledge of these commands will not only result in a finished hunting dog and pet, but you will be proud that your young canine is not an incorrigible oaf! The commands I attempt to teach include: *sit*, *stay*, *down*, *heel* and *fetch*. I also acclimate the pups to discharging weapons and riding in vehicles to prevent them from becoming gun-shy or scared of vehicles later when they are eventually taken hunting.

We often use turkey wings and tails salvaged from previous successful hunts to introduce the young dogs to their future mission in life. These appendages are tied to a long rope, then whirled through the air and pulled swiftly through fields and woods. The pups attempt to capture and retrieve the feathers; they usually get a huge charge out of this exciting game.

It is essential to get your hunting prospects out in the big woods and involved with flocks of the large game birds as soon as possible. The perfect situation occurs when, soon after the hunting season opens, your pup encounters a flock of or a single turkey. Then, should the young dog flush turkeys and someone cripples a big black bird, the acid test presents itself. If the puppy trails, barks at, captures and subdues the cripple, you will thereafter be the proud owner of a professional turkey dog. As soon as your prospect gets its mouth on a wild turkey and you can pet and praise your puppy lavishly, the young dog immediately gets the message that he has found his role in life.

Training, developing and then hunting with an outstanding turkey dog is an unequalled experience. To some of us addicted to the sport, going turkey hunting in the autumn without a good canine as a companion would be comparable to going fishing without a rod or canoeing without a paddle. It would be darn near pointless. □

Kit Shaffer is a retired Game Department biologist and an expert on turkeys and turkey hunting. He lives in Lynchburg.

Not just any dog is good enough —for a coon hunter.

by Steve Ausband

Sometimes it's nice to find out how wrong you can be. It happened to me recently. I had spent so many years trying to fool ducks into believing that hunks of plastic were other ducks, or trying to figure out where gray trout are going to hole up in the Chesapeake Bay, or trying either to outwit or outwait a squirrel or a deer, that I had begun to think I knew a little about most kinds of outdoor sports. Take coon hunting, for instance. I had been a couple of times, many years ago, and I remembered it as being an occasion for running through every briar patch and almost every body of water in the county in pursuit of a couple of slack-jawed, deep-voiced hounds which, my host assured me, were themselves in pursuit of a raccoon. Since I never saw the coon, I couldn't swear to it. I could swear that coon hunters were even crazier than duck hunters. I carried that opinion around with me for years, along with the notion that running dogs at night in pursuit of a raccoon was at best a haphazard venture.

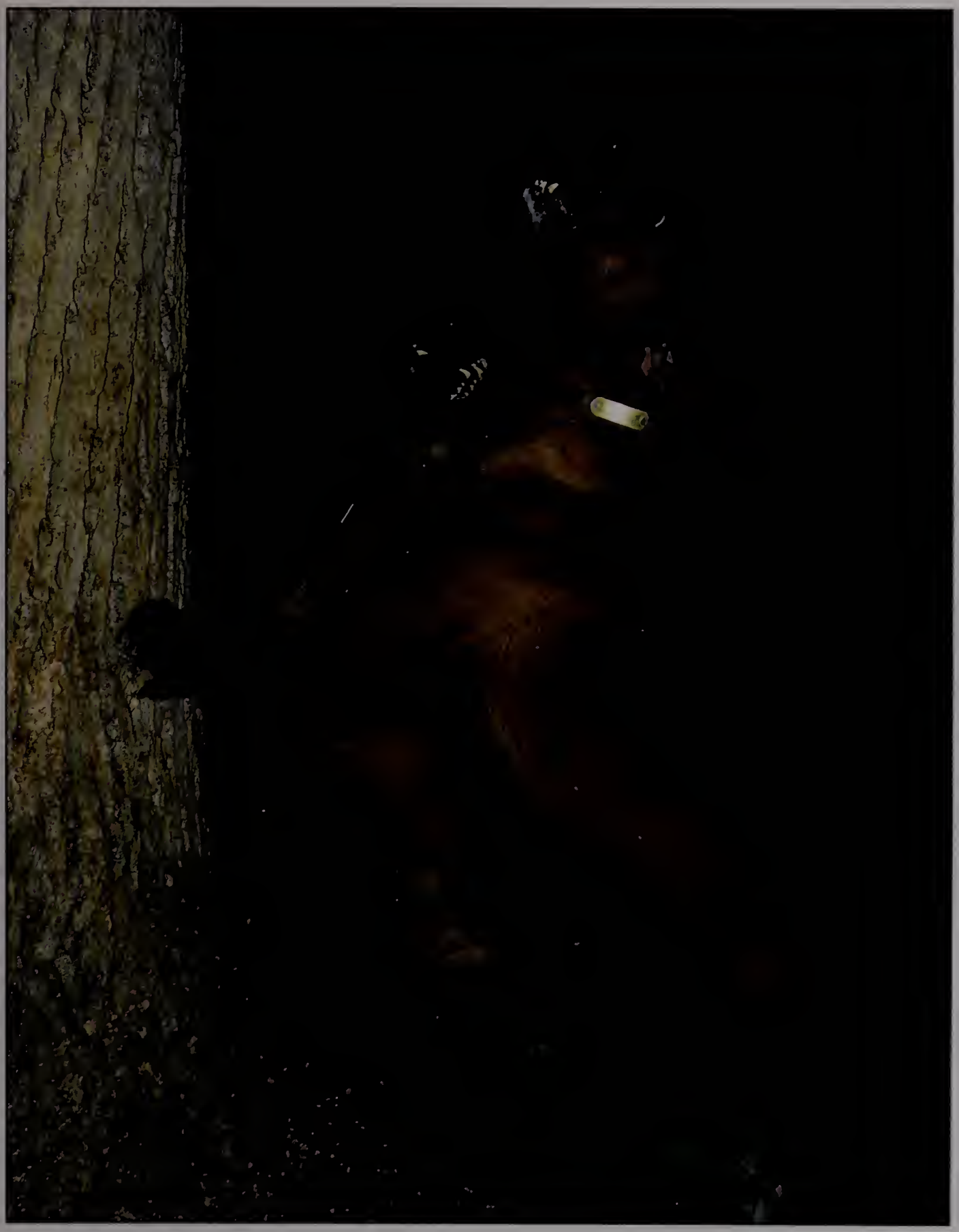
I was wrong, wrong, wrong. Real coon hunters and real coon dogs are no more haphazard about their sport than native brook trout specialists are about theirs. My problem was simply that, as a teenager running through swamps and briar patches, I never ran into anyone as serious about the business as Willard Burnett. (And if I had, he would have told me then that if you have the right dog, you don't need to run after him all the time. You can wait until he barks "treed" and then walk to him.)

Above: Coon hunter Willard Burnett shows off some of his championship Walkers; photo by Steve Ausband. Opposite: Redbones are also popular coon dogs; photo by Lynda Richardson.

Willard Burnett is a coon hunter. Oh, he hunts other things occasionally, he says—deer once in a while, or doves. Years ago he used to quail hunt. But now he is a specialist. And if Burnett is a specialist, his dogs are even more so.

"The thing about coon hunting," he told me, "is that you take a dog from a good stock, you train him right, and you get him ready to go up against what I think may be the smartest animal in the woods. And he does it by himself. You're not there to tell him 'don't do this' or 'leave that alone.' He can't be pulled off by deer or rabbits or anything else jumping up in front of him. He can't run junk, and he can't tree junk. He has to do just one thing, and that is find a coon and run it until it goes up a tree, and then he has to keep it there until you come. Nothing else can matter to him. That's asking a lot of the dog, and it takes a good one."

Burnett knows good dogs, and other people know of his expertise. During the two hours I talked with him one warm Sunday afternoon, we were interrupted by four telephone calls. Three of them were from people ask-



A lot of equipment and expense goes into serious coon hunting; photo by Lynda Richardson.

ing about coon dogs. No, he did not have any for sale right now. Yes, he might later. He had five dogs and a new litter of 10 pups. No, he did not know of any really good dogs for sale just now.

"I hunt Walkers," he said. "There are other good dogs—Blue Ticks, Black and Tans, Redbones. They'll all tree a coon. But Walkers are a little quicker tree dogs; they seem to try harder, and they're a little flashier." Burnett hunts in competitions frequently, and he explained that the Walker hounds generally dominate the events. There are more Walkers entered now, and many more Walkers winning.

Burnett has been coon hunting nearly all his life. He grew up in the Ringgold Mountain Hill community near Danville, and his father hunted coons along the Dan River bottoms and elsewhere in Pittsylvania and Halifax counties. Burnett's sport now takes him over some of the same territory, as well as into neighboring North Carolina. When he enters his dogs in Professional Kennel Club or United Kennel Club competitions, he may travel much further. And these days, other hunters travel to see his dogs, hunters from Tennessee, Pennsylvania, Kentucky.

"I started out with just grade dogs," he said. "We had some pretty good dogs even then, but they were nothing like what we have now. About 20 years ago we started working exclusively with registered dogs. Kent Spencer and I were interested in seeing what we could do with Walkers." Spencer, who now lives in Wilson, North Carolina, founded the River Bend bloodline, and his dog, River Bend Flag, was the progenitor of the line of dogs that Burnett and others hunt today. "In Virginia, in Pennsylvania, even up in Canada, they have heard of River Bend dogs," Burnett says. "We bred very carefully—we still do—and there have been a lot of champions out of River Bend Flag."

"How many?" I wondered out loud.

"I'll find out," he said. He picked up the telephone and called a friend named Steve Smith, who had the numbers. Burnett wrote them down.

"The last time Steve checked, there were 1,623 puppies out of that line of River Bend Flag. There have been 100 Night Champions and 26 Grand Night Champions in the line. That was back around the first of June when he checked, of course. I'm sure there are more now."

Prices run high for top-quality coon dogs. "You can get a decent grade dog, that is, a broke dog without a pedigree, for around $1,200," Burnett told me. For a dog with good bloodlines, one that comes from a line of champions like Flag, the price tag is much higher. Untrained puppies go for $500-$750, and for a trained dog, one that has demonstrated that it will behave properly, tree a coon, and not "run junk," the cost can run from $5,000 to $7,500 or more. "It all depends," he said. "I've been offered that much for dogs and not sold them. A man came down here to hunt with me one time and offered me whatever I wanted for a dog that he and I had hunted a couple of nights. He *started* at $5,000. I wouldn't sell. Then, wouldn't you know it, two weeks later the dog fell out of a tree and got killed." (Many coonhounds will pursue the animal right up a leaning tree trunk, and some, such as the one Burnett was describing, will even use jaws and paws to scramble up twisted mazes of grape vines and low limbs and actually climb a perpendicular tree. Since dogs are not exactly designed as tree-dwellers, this particular display of enthusiasm—what coon hunters call "heart"—can be a dangerous habit.)

Coon hunting can get to be an expensive hobby, if it is pursued seriously. Anything that begins with a dog costing more then a good used car is a high-ticket enterprise in my book, and certainly a far cry from the haphazard woods-running I had indulged in as a kid. Then when you add the cost of the truck, the dog box, the boots, the lights (Willard Burnett showed me a *light* that cost over $300), you're talking about the kind of expenditure that most of us cannot afford to be casual about. No wonder these guys are serious!

Dogs and hunters get a chance to prove themselves at trials. Three or four dogs at a time compete in a three-

"I almost never take down a coon anymore. It's usually not necessary. The dogs know they have done right."—Willard Burnett; *photo by Pat Cooley.*

hour long "cast." The dogs may receive points for striking and treeing; points are taken away if the dog leaves the tree, if he fails to track the coon and simply blunders into another dog which has already treed, if he barks "treed" and no coon can be seen by the judges when they arrive, or if (heaven forbid!) he trees something other than a coon. Night Champions must accumulate a total of 100 points and must win an entire hunt; Grand Night Champions must win five times hunting in events with only other Night Champions.

"Back when I got started in trials, about 15 years ago," Burnett said, "there was a lot of arguing at the events, and things were not very well run. I dropped out for a while. Now things are run smoothly, you have good judging, the rules are strictly enforced, and the organization is better." Burnett himself serves occasionally as a judge and frequently as a guide during the local trials.

The trials, he explains, are much more demanding than an ordinary, leisurely hunt. "You have to be mentally alert constantly," he says. "You have to be able to tell exactly when your dog strikes, and you can't afford to make a mistake or to be a second late. Being a second late can cost you a lot." Burnett's physical preparations include running in the evenings and working the dogs. "Both you and the dogs have to be in shape for competition."

Young dogs learn by being in association with good, experienced hounds. Often, Burnett will take one of his own pups along with one or two older dogs belonging to a fellow hunter. But, he is very careful that the dogs the pups associate with during these early hunts are reliable themselves. Nothing can ruin even a very promising young dog, he explains, faster than running with bad company. If a pup sees another dog chase a deer, it might be drawn to join the chase. Very soon, however, if the pup is a good one and is trained properly, it becomes a specialist, ignoring everything in the woods except its masked, ring-tailed quarry.

It took me a while to get around to asking what might have been the obvious question. "How does a hunt typically end?" For Willard Burnett, it almost always ends by calling off the dogs and walking back to the truck. The point is the chase, the treeing, the successful viewing of the coon. The dogs have, after all, demonstrated that they are worth their keep, they have done precisely what they have been bred and trained to do. "I almost never take down a coon anymore," Burnett said. "It's usually just not necessary. The dogs know they have done right." The raccoons are important to men like Willard Burnett, and he takes pains to see that they are protected. "Nothing makes me madder than seeing somebody shoot something for no reason and make no use of it," he said. "Years ago, a man told me he was out quail hunting and saw five coons in a tree, and he killed every one of them. He didn't eat them, he didn't use them in any way. He just destroyed them. I told him it was as stupid and wasteful as if I destroyed a whole covey of young quail."

I asked how people get started in coon hunting—that is, people who did not grow up doing it with fathers or older neighbors. "You just about have to know somebody," said Burnett. "You need advice on the dogs to get, and it takes a while to find where to go and just how to do things." One of his neighbors down the road started last year, he said. The man now has two dogs, the truck, the light, the works.

I cast an eye over Willard Burnett's backyard, past the pen with the light-colored bitch and her 10 puppies, down to the larger pen with the other dogs, including the young male, Slim, that shows so much promise, that he might soon become a Night Champion himself. Not a one of them will run junk; they're as serious about coon hunting as Willard Burnett himself. And I had thought all this was just a lot of running through the bushes after dark.

"You'll have to go with us some night," offered Burnett.

"Thanks," I said. "I'd like that." □

Steve Ausband is the chairman of the English Department of Averett College in Danville, and is a frequent contributor to Virginia Wildlife.

Building the Perfect Retriever

The North American Hunting Retriever Association is working hard to preserve the hunting heritage of retrievers and improve the breeding stock of gun dogs in this country.

story by Reyn Kinzey
photos by Lynda Richardson

A shotgun blast breaks the silence of the May morning, echoing across a nearby pond. A crippled pheasant runs 30 yards into high grass. Immediately, a Labrador retriever is sent out after the bird, finds it in the heavy cover, and returns the bird to his owner's hand. A typical hunting scene, and one proving the worth of a gun dog to the sportsman in the field.

Except that this isn't a real hunt; it's the second annual ALPO/NAHRA Invitational Field Test, held at Curles Neck Farm near Richmond, and the dogs are 30 of the best working retrievers in the country.

But the hunting situation is real. In all field tests licensed by NAHRA—the North American Hunting Retriever Association—conditions simulate as closely as possible real hunting situations, and dogs are judged on hunting abilities. NAHRA's general goal as an association is to help maintain the retriever breeds as true hunting dogs.

It's a mark of how far we've fallen from the natural order that we need an association to make sure that retrievers are really retrievers. Approximately 97 percent of the Labrador retrievers in this country are bred for show or to become pets. That leaves only 3 percent for the nearly two million waterfowl hunters in the country. There simply aren't enough dogs of quality hunting stock to go around. According to NAHRA president Jack Jagoda, most hunters in this country haven't realized what a good hunting retriever can do.

NAHRA would like to change all that.

The idea for NAHRA was first conceived at a Gun Dog Field Trial event at Curles Neck Farm in 1982, so the second Invitational Field Test was a coming home of sorts. In 1982, Richard Wolters, who was then living in New York and writing for *Gun Dog* magazine (he now lives in Hanover County and handled a dog at this year's Test) watched the trial and wondered why dogs always had to run against other dogs instead of against a standard. In a traditional field trial, 90

dogs may compete, and only the first four places receive any recognition. That makes field trials pretty exclusive; you've got to train long and hard to compete for a few top places. Worse still, people want to breed only to the top field champions, further restricting an already diminished gene pool of retrieving dogs for the hunter.

Wolters used his forum in *Gun Dog* to promote his idea for a national association sponsoring "non-competitive" dog trials (finally to be designated Field Tests). The idea attracted Ned Spears, who became the first president of NAHRA, and Jack Jagoda, the current president. Some of the more traditional organizations, such as the American Kennel Club (AKC), the largest registry in the country, were skeptical at first, but now, six years later, NAHRA has over 3,000 members and 110 clubs in America and Canada. And in fact, the AKC has recently introduced its own series of non-competitive "hunting tests" for hunting breeds.

But to say that these NAHRA Field Tests are "non-competitive" can be misleading. They're tough. For an uninitiated observer like me, the NAHRA Invitational was a chance to lounge in the sun and watch the dogs. But for the people—and dogs—involved, it's serious work.

Tests on NAHRA's Senior Level evaluate dogs on four basic hunting skills: trailing, (the ability to hunt down and retrieve a wounded bird); quartering, (the ability to find a live bird and put it before the gun); marking, (the dog's ability to watch a bird go down and then retrieve it); and, finally, an almost magical ability to perform a "blind" retrieve—retrieving a bird the dog hasn't seen go down, by responding to hand, voice and whistle commands of the handler. Since dogs need to retrieve "marked" and "blind" retrieves on both land and water, these four basic skills make up the six basic tests on the senior level, and dogs are scored on all six. A perfect score is 60. A score of 48—80 percent—is considered passing.

But it's a long way to the Senior Level. NAHRA starts dogs in the

"Started Hunting Retriever" category. On this level, a dog needs to do five basic marked retrieves, two on land, two on water, and the other at the judges' discretion. When a dog has qualified twice in this category, he is awarded a Started Certificate and can move on to the Intermediate Category.

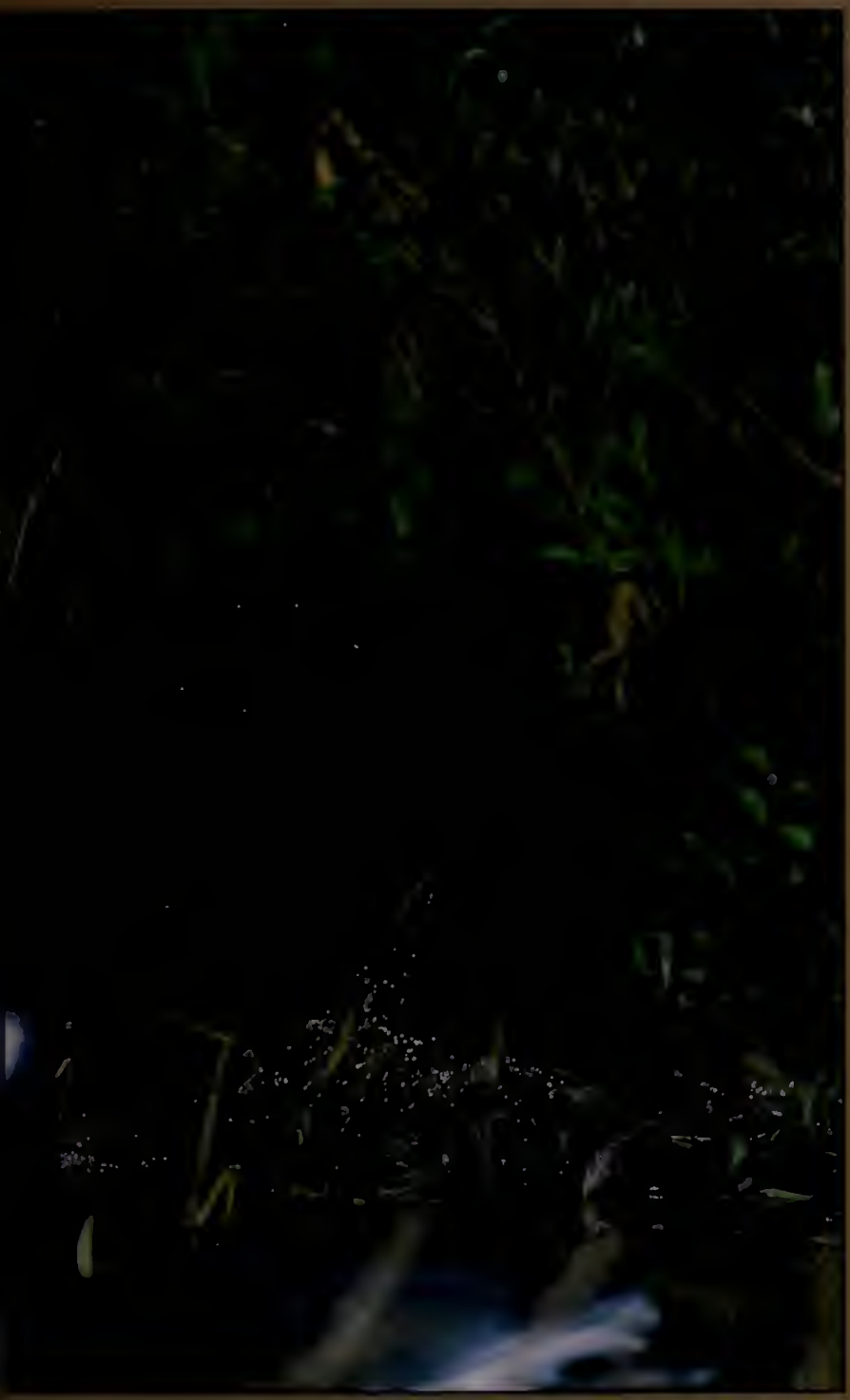
That's when the big jump comes. At the intermediate level, the dog has to have almost all the same abilities as the Seniors, although he doesn't have to have developed them as far. He has to be able to perform multiple retrieves, bringing back one bird while remembering where another is, and then retrieving the second bird. He now has to deliver the bird to hand rather than a general area; he has to be steady (he can no longer be restrained on a check cord as he can in the Started category); he has to able to quarter and to trail, although he doesn't yet have to be successful in flushing a bird; and, finally, he has to be able to do a blind retrieve in water, at a distance of about 30 yards, within a basic hunting range.

Once a dog has qualified four times in the Intermediate category, he is awarded the title of Working Retriever (WR) and can start competing in the Senior category. Tests get harder: two blind retrieves are required, this time at distances approaching 100 yards, and one has to be over land, as well as over water.

When a dog qualifies five times on the Senior Level, he becomes a Master Hunting Retriever (MHR). For the first years of NAHRA, that was as far as a dog could go. He might as well retire. That's why the Invitational was created: to keep these Master Hunters active. This year, dogs which accumulated over 100 points in the 1987 calendar year (a dog gets 20 points for qualifying at a Senior Test) were invited to the all-expenses-paid NAHRA Invitational at Curles Neck Farm. Another two which had accumulated 80 points were also invited, to round out the field at 30. Of these 30, 19 qualified at the event, and became members of this year's "All-American Hunting Retriever Team."

Whether or not a dog makes it that far depends on his abilities—largely

This year, at the NAHRA Invitational Test at Curles Neck Farm near Richmond, 30 of the best working NAHRA retrievers in the country were invited to compete in difficult retrieving events that simulated true hunting situations—to show us all what hunting retrievers can do.



determined by breeding—and training. Breeding is a subject that can bring out knives. There are Labrador lovers, Chesapeake enthusiasts, water spaniel nuts, and golden retriever loyalists. Even among Labrador lovers, blood can be spilt if you insist too loudly that yellow dogs can't win.

Certainly, the breed of dog that a hunter buys depends partly on his purposes, but it should also depend on his temperament—and I mean the owner's, not just the dog's. If you're mostly going to hunt upland birds and want a good pet as well as a retriever, a golden retriever is a good choice. But don't buy one if you tend to get loud when you get angry with your dog. Golden retrievers are a little timid and can't handle psychological abuse (on the other hand, they're so eager to please, you've got to be really mean to yell at one). If you have a hard head and a thick skin, by all means, get a Chesapeake Bay retriever. Chances are that you won't be able to train him and he won't be able to train you, but you can chew empty beer cans together. Of course, if you want a dog you could enter in a Triathlon contest, you can't find a tougher retriever.

But if you want to go with statistics, go for the Labrador. They are, at least in terms of numbers, the favorite among hunters, Field Trialers, and Field Testers. In fact, all 30 of the dogs invited to the Invitational were Labs.

And 25 of them were black. Black is the dominate gene in Labs; yellow is recessive to black, and chocolate is recessive to yellow. Because of the rarity of those two colors, mostly they've been bred as show dogs rather than as hunting dogs. Yellow and chocolate Labs can make excellent working dogs, but it's important to look closely for a hunting background in these dogs.

Getting a puppy with a hunting background is the key to getting a puppy that will develop into a decent working retriever. But finding out about a retriever's pedigree is sometimes more difficult than it should be, and that, too, is something that NAHRA is trying to change.

If a retriever is registered with the American Kennel Club, you can get

his pedigree from them. Unfortunately, the AKC doesn't list titles that a dog might have won in United Kennel Club Trials, or Canadian Kennel Club Trials, or NAHRA events. Their own AKC titles aren't always clear; you can't blame someone who thinks he's getting a good dog when he sees a lot of "Ch's" (Champions) in his pedigree. But "Champion" is a show designation. If you want a working dog, you need to be looking for an FC—Field Champion title. But don't expect to find too many of those. Remember, in Field Trials, there can only be three or four winners.

To recognize all the other dogs from good working stock, NAHRA is now beginning to make available a pedigree that will show all of a dog's titles: AKC, UKC, CKC, as well as NAHRA designations, such as Working Retriever and Master Hunting Retriever. NAHRA is not trying to replace the kennel clubs—they're not going to be a breed registry, and they will require dogs to be registered with one of the major kennel clubs—but they will be offering this information free, so that people interested in finding a retriever with good working bloodlines will be able to find one.

Then the development of the dog is up to the owner, and the level of commitment he or she is willing to make.

There's a lot the average hunter with a dog in the backyard can do on his own. There are some good books that can help. James Lamb Free's *Training Your Retriever*, which first came out in 1949, is a classic. Jerome Robinson, the gun dog editor for *Sports Afield* has a new book out, *Hunt Close*. Richard Wolters's *Water Dog* may have outsold all the others; it stresses the importance of starting early (on the 49th day, when you pick the puppy up from the breeder's). And NAHRA publishes a quarterly with training tips and lists of upcoming events.

But trying to do it all on your own can get lonely, not to mention frustrating. Jack Jagoda, the president of NAHRA, urges people to get involved with local retriever clubs; almost all NAHRA members are also members

Virginia's Retriever Clubs

James River Retriever Club
Tom Doran, Treasurer
Route 1, Box 2245
Rockville, VA 23146
(804) 749-3049

Tidewater Retriever Club
Mike Hatcher, President
3022 Stony Point Road
Richmond, VA 23235
(804) 320-7759

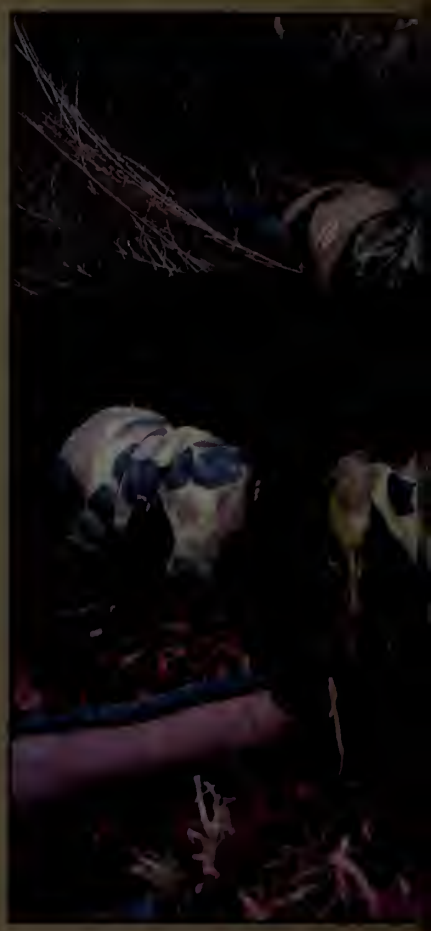
Blue Ridge Retriever Club
Jane Kelso
Mt. Run Kennels
Route 8, Box 70
Culpeper, VA 22701
(703) 547-2961

Back Bay-Knotts Island Retriever Club
Janis Yeats
609 Wythe Creek Road
Poquoson, VA 23662
(804) 868-6456

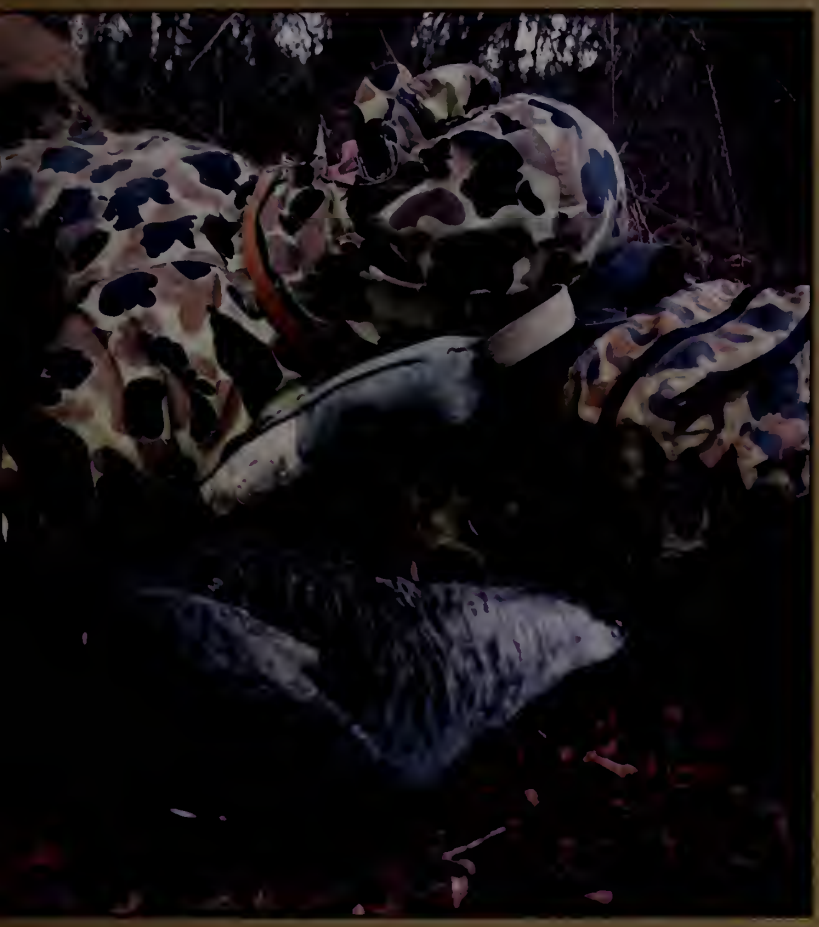
Aylett DU Retriever Club
Joe May
Sharihil Kennels
Walkerton, VA 23177
(804) 769-2219

Powhatan DU Retriever Club
Contact: Janet Sowers
2437 Huguenot Spring Road
Midlothian, VA 23113
(804) 794-3207

North American Hunting Retriever Association (NAHRA)
Jack Jagoda, President
P.O. Box 6
Garrisonville, VA 22463
(703) 752-4000



Above: For the retriever, the true test is in the field. And, after it's all over? A well-deserved snooze is in order. Right: Although hunting tests and field trials are well attended and corner a great deal of interest, the real purpose of them all is to keep a dog's hunting heritage alive



of local clubs. NAHRA doesn't require people to be members to participate in their events, though. "We're more interested in training dogs than getting members," Jagoda says.

But if a hunter gets a good pup, trains him, and follows through, the results can be spectacular. The final event in this year's Invitational was a combination marked and blind multiple retrieve in some pretty evil looking water called Jack Hack's Pond (I was wondering if a dog would come up with an alligator out of it). To make things even more difficult for the dogs, a diversion bird was added. Basically, the scenario was this: the handler was allowed to see a duck dropped into the water on the opposite side of the pond (the "blind" retrieve). Then the dog was brought out and allowed to see two ducks "shot" off to the right (these weren't really shot; they were dropped in dead as the guns went off). The dogs went in and retrieved the two "marked" retrieves first, but then, as they were bringing in the second, an additional duck was released and shot off to the left, not far from the dog. The temptation for the dog was to go for the duck he had seen shot, but he was expected to leave this bird and follow this handler's instructions to retrieve the "blind" duck he hadn't seen. Only then was he allowed to go after the additional duck.

Almost all of the dogs resisted temptation better then most of us humans could have done. On the very last dog, Senor Zorro, owned by Robert Ruggeri, from Washington, the gunners almost missed the duck. The last shot got the bird, but it tumbled down beyond the water into the trees and thickets beyond the pond. Zorro took a good look, shrugged his shoulders, swam over to the other side of the pond, retrieved the blind duck in proper order, then jumped back in the water, swam this time to the left side of the pond, scrambled out under the trees, and brought in the last duck of the day. The gallery applauded, but it's all in a day's work for a hunting retriever. □

Reyn Kinzey is a freelance writer who teaches writing at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Highland
Wildlife Management Area

Location: In Highland County, west of Staunton, south of U.S. Highway 250 and north of the tiny community of Williamsville, lies Highland Wildlife Management Area. To reach the area's more northern major segment, Jack Mountain, take State Route 615 south from an intersection with U.S. 250 about 2 miles west of McDowell. The Bullpasture Mountain segment, near Williamsville, lies along Route 678. The two main segments are separated by the Bullpasture River valley and some two miles of private land along the river.

Description: Terrain is typical of Virginia's Ridge and Valley Province. Moderate to steep wooded slopes adjoin more gently contoured land along major stream drainages. A major break in the nearly total forest cover of the area is a patch of over 100 acres of bluegrass atop Jack Mountain, where young turkeys and grouse congregate to feed on abundant insects during spring and summer. Most accessible mature timber has been cut from the area. In 1930, the last of it was harvested commercially just prior to acquisition of the land for wildlife management. Wildfires once burned the cutover timberland frequently, but since the 1960s, fires have been largely prevented or controlled. Young and middle-aged timber stands now offer adequate wildlife food supplies most years, and provide diversified habitat types as well. The goal of today's land and timber management plan is to maintain this wildlife habitat productivity and diversity, by maintenance and development of small clearings and waterholes, planting and encouraging shrubs and trees for soft mast (grapes, berries, seeds) and small acreage timber harvests staggered both in location and time as tree stands reach maturity.

Hunting: Hunters enjoy a complete selection of native forest game species on the Highland Area. Bullpasture Mountain is well known for its deer, turkey and grouse. Highland is bear country, too, although populations are not as dense in these mountains as in some localities along the Blue Ridge. Jack Mountain, the more rugged and less accessible tract, contains good bear range and supports an above average bobcat population.

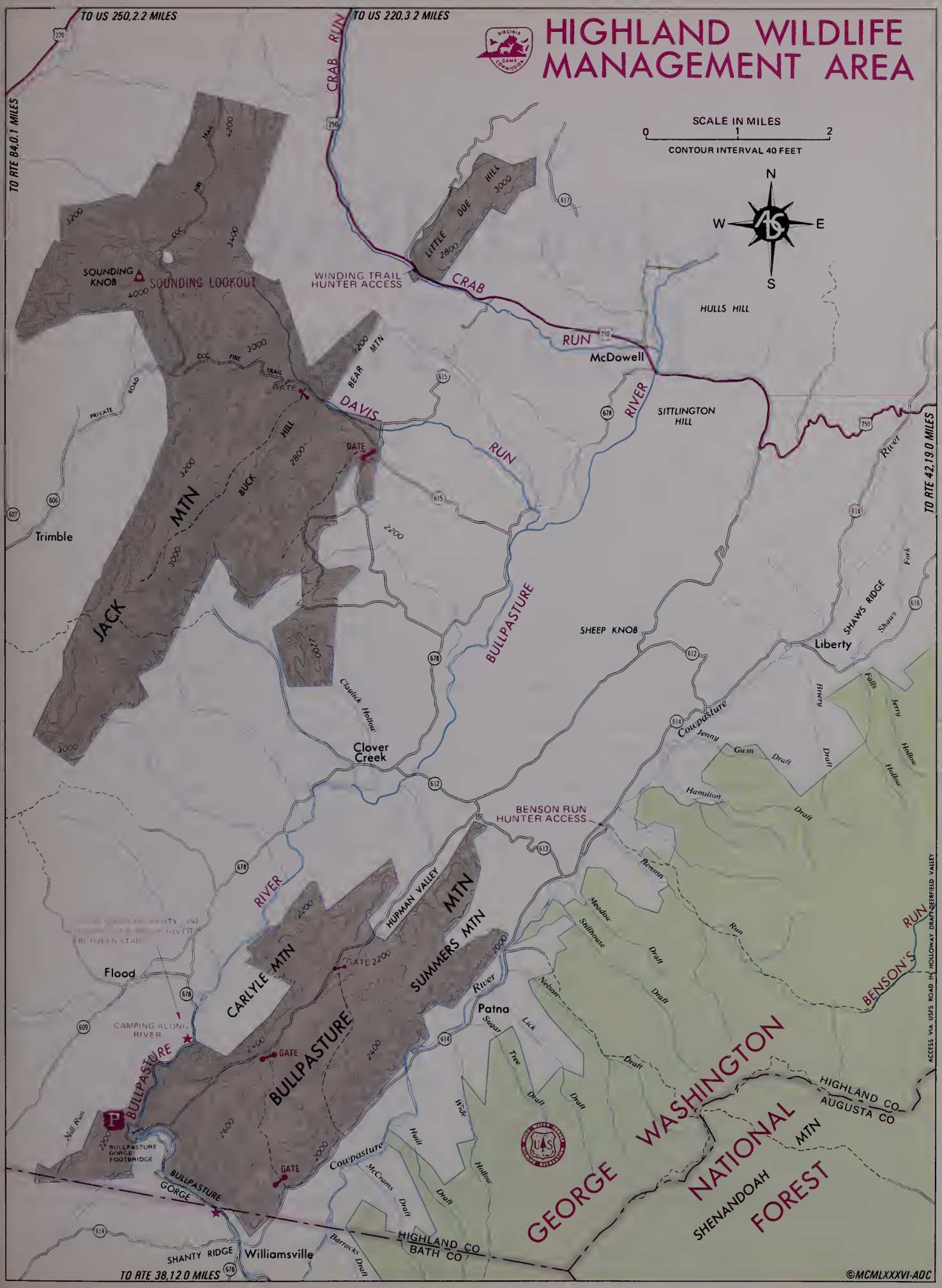
Fishing: The Bullpasture and Cowpasture Rivers adjoin or run through the management area at a number of points and are generally less than two miles distant elsewhere. The Cowpasture yields smallmouth and rock (redeye) bass, while the larger Bullpasture is a delightful mountain stream usually kept well-stocked with keeper-sized trout.

Facilities: Roads and trails provide some access to the interiors of the main tracts, especially the Bullpasture tract. Much of Jack Mountain, particularly its southern ridges and knobs, is accessible only by foot or horseback through challenging terrain.

Regulations: Hunting and fishing regulations conform generally to those applicable to the rest of Highland County. Check the Department's annual game and fish law digest brochures for any variations that may be in effect.

Points of Interest: Visitors are welcome on the area at all seasons, to hike, ride horseback, or enjoy the mountains in other ways as well as to hunt or fish. Heavy snowfalls are common at these elevations, and the opportunity for a bit of rough cross country skiing on the area is not an uncommon occurrence.

Just south of Bullpasture Mountain, in a beautifully scenic setting, the Department operates Coursey Springs Fish Cultural Station, where one may see literally millions of trout in various stages of development and growth and where fishing is permitted downstream below trout rearing runs. □


HIGHLAND WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA
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SOUNDING LOOKOUT
HULLS HILL
McDowell
SITTLINGTON HILL
DAVIS RUN
BEAR MTN
BUCK HILL
JACK MTN
Trimble
BULLPASTURE RIVER
SHEEP KNOB
SHAWS RIDGE
Liberty
Clover Creek
Claulick Hollow
Cowpasture
Jenny Gwin Draft
Hamilton Draft
Briery Draft
Falls Jerry Hollow
Shaws Fork
BENSON RUN HUNTER ACCESS
Benson Run
Meadow Stillhouse Draft
Nelson Draft
Sugar Tree Draft
Lick Draft
Wide Hollow
Huilt Draft
McCrams Draft
Barracks Draft
HUPMAN VALLEY
SUMMERS MTN
CARLYLE MTN
Flood
CAMPING ALONG RIVER
Patna
BULLPASTURE GORGE FOOTBRIDGE
BULLPASTURE GORGE
SHANTY RIDGE
Williamsville
GEORGE WASHINGTON NATIONAL FOREST
SHENANDOAH MTN
HIGHLAND CO
AUGUSTA CO
BATH CO
BENSON'S RUN
ACCESS VIA USFS ROAD IN HOLLOWAY DRAFT-DEERFIELD VALLEY
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Clinch River Float Trips

The Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, in cooperation with the Tennessee Valley Authority, Russell and Scott Counties, the Town of St. Paul, and the Lenowisco and Cumberland Plateau Planning District Commissions, has worked hard to provide access on the almost 100 miles between Blackford (Route 80) Bridge and the Tennessee Line for canoeists, kayakers, and jon boaters. This stretch of the Clinch begins in Tazewell County, encompasses sweeping views of the Appalachian Mountains and valleys, and flows through mountain gorges on its way into Tennessee and Norris Reservoir. Fishermen should find some hefty smallmouth and muskies in these waters. In addition, fall and winter duck shooting should not be overlooked, as resident populations of woodies and mallards are readily available. And don't forget the required licenses and life jackets for each person in your boat.—*Jerry G. Fouse, Assistant Chief, Lands and Engineering*

Below is a description of several one-day canoe trips you can plan on the Clinch River. Starting upriver, match the trips with the points on the map inside. Fishing between Blackford (Route 80) Bridge and the Tennessee Line is excellent. Smallmouth, muskies, red eyes, bluegill, and catfish are the most popular species sought by anglers. **Caution:** There are several Class I, II, and III rapids on the upper stretch between Blackford Bridge and Nash's Ford. Check a topographic map before attempting to float these sections. **Remember:** Personal flotation devices are required for each person in any boat, including canoes and kayaks.

Russell County Section

Blackford to Puckett's Hole (Route 80 bridge to Route 652 bridge):
Paddle time: 4-6 hours. 9 miles. Exceptional mountain scenery and vistas. Excellent fishing, particularly below the numerous ledges (riffles) and where creeks enter the river. Takeout on river right after going under the Route 652 bridge.

Puckett's Hole to Nash's Ford (Route 652 bridge to Route 645 bridge):
Paddle time: 4-6 hours. 9 miles. Numerous Class I, II and III rapids. Probably the most beautiful and exciting nine miles of the Clinch River, as it passes through a scenic and almost untouched gorge. Excellent fishing, particularly below the numerous ledges (riffles) and where creeks enter the river (particularly Big Cedar Creek). Takeout on river left near the church and before the Route 645 bridge.

Nash's Ford to Cleveland (Route 645 bridge to Route 82 bridge):
Paddle time: 4-6 hours. 8 miles. Numerous ledges and deep holes for excellent fishing, particularly for muskies. Good section for *safe* late fall and winter duck hunting. Takeout on river right after going under the Route 82 bridge in Cleveland Town Park next to the picnic shelter. General Store in Cleveland.

Cleveland to Carterton (Route 82 bridge to Route 614 bridge):
Paddle time: 4-6 hours. 8 miles. Numerous ledges. Excellent fishing, particularly below the numerous ledges (riffles) and where creeks enter the river. A deep hole just upriver of the Carbo Power Plant provides good fishing. Good section for *safe* late fall and winter duck hunting. Takeout on river left after going under the Route 614 bridge.

Carterton to St. Paul (Route 614 bridge to Route 58 bridge):
Paddle time: 4-6 hours. 9 miles. Good beginning section for familes wanting to learn how to canoe and fish. Excellent muskie fishing in the deeper holes and where creeks enter the river. Takeout on river right just above the Route 58 bridge in Mathews Memorial Park. If gate is locked, the key can be obtained at the Town Police Office. General stores in St. Paul are available for provisions.

Scott County Section

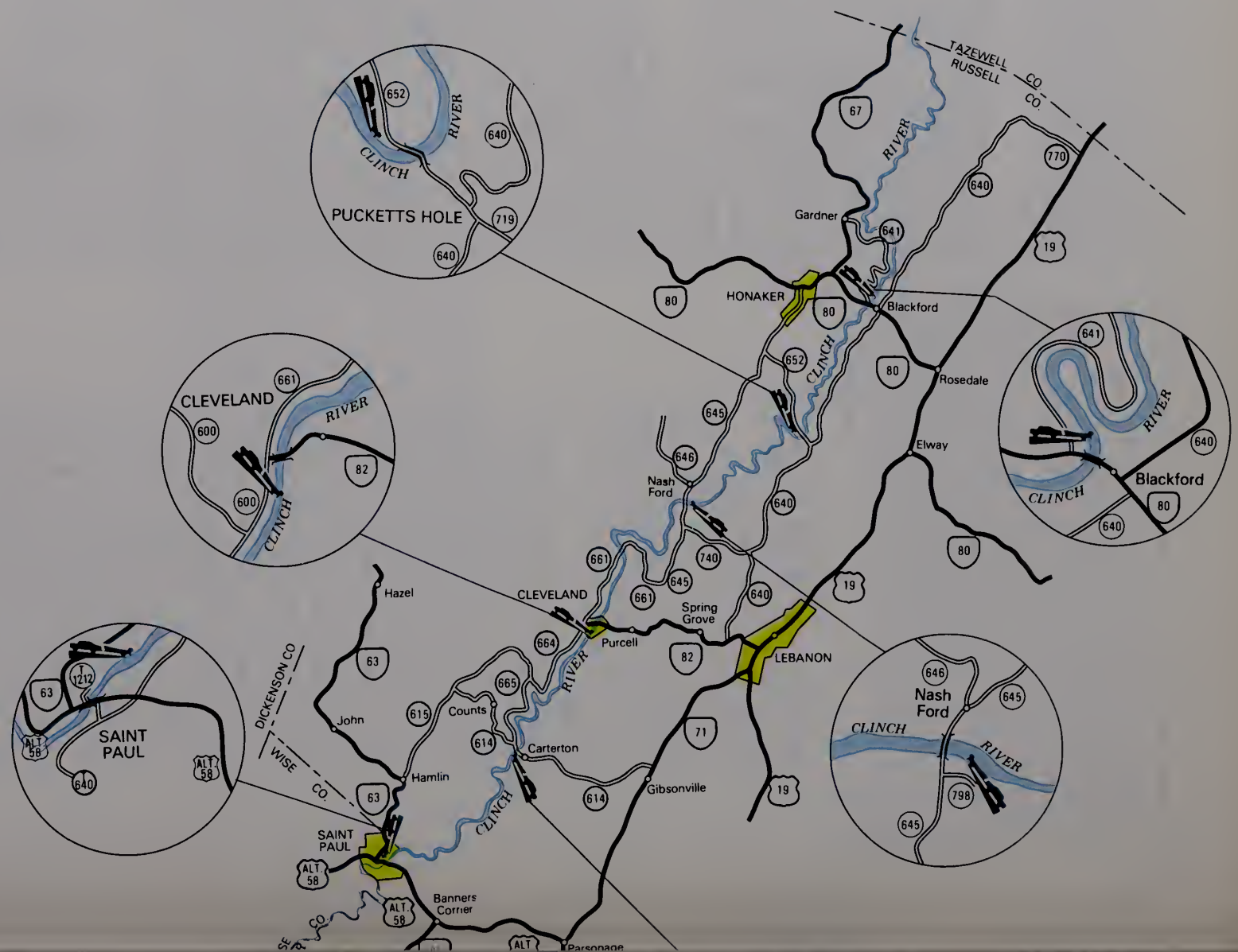
St. Paul to Dungannon (Route 58 bridge to Route 72 bridge):
Paddle time: 10-12 hours. 18 miles. Numerous Class I-II rapids. Exceptional vistas. Excellent fishing, particularly below the numerous ledges (riffles) and where creeks enter the river. Takeout on river right after going under the Route 72 bridge.

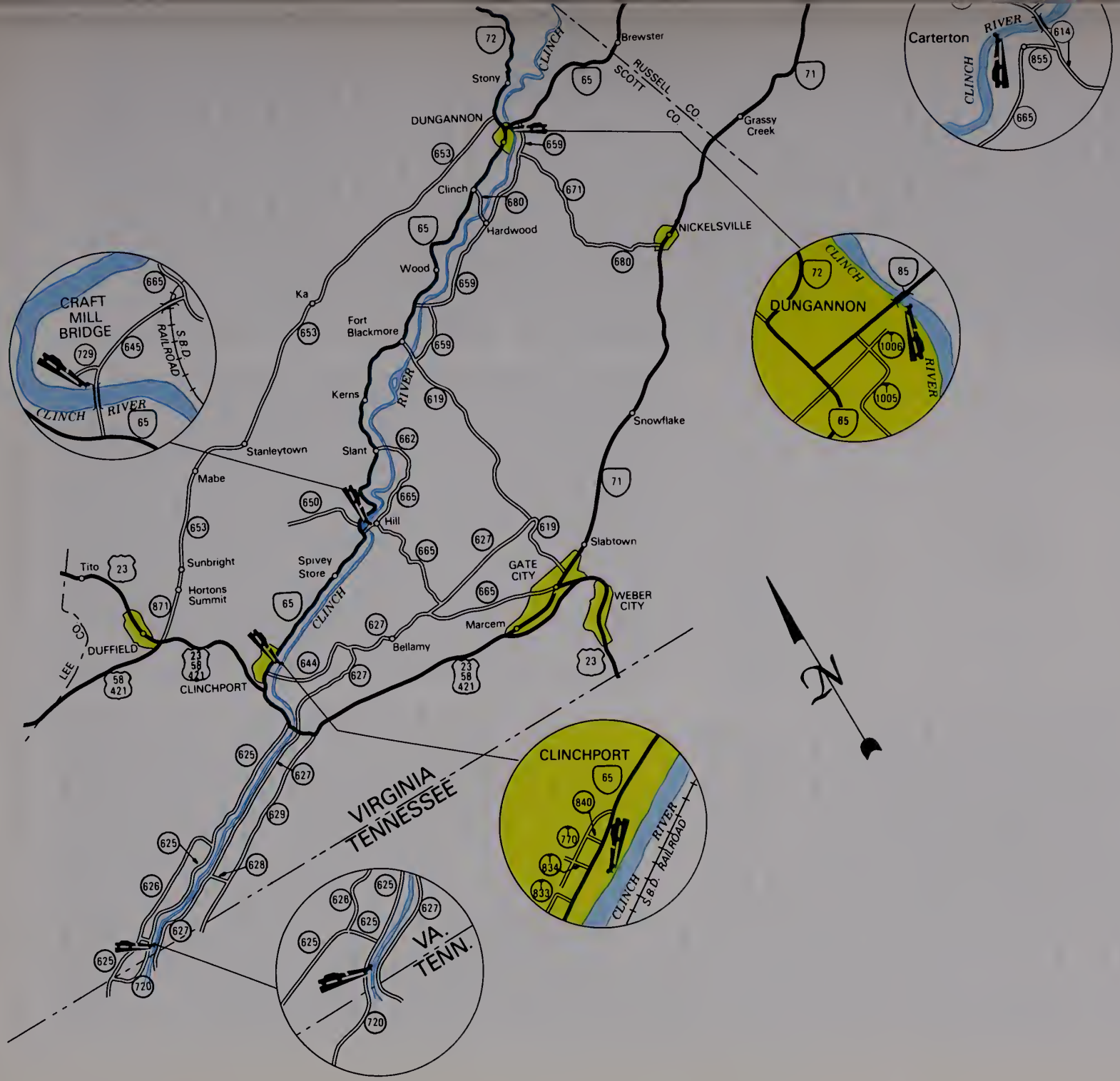
Dungannon to Craft's Mill (Route 72 bridge to Route 729 bridge):
Paddle time: 10-12 hours. 18 miles. Exceptional mountain scenery and vistas. Excellent fishing, particularly below the numerous ledges (riffles) and where creeks enter the river. Takeout on river left just above the Route 729 bridge.

Craft's Mill to Clinchport (Route 729 bridge to Route 65):
Paddle time: 4-6 hours. 6 miles. Numerous Class I-II rapids. Exceptional mountain scenery and vistas. Excellent fishing, particularly below the numerous ledges (riffles) and where creeks enter the river. Takeout on river right near Route 65.

Clinchport to Stateline (Route 65 to Route 625):
Paddle time: 6-8 hours. 11 miles. Numerous Class I-II rapids. Exceptional mountain scenery and vistas. Excellent fishing, particularly below the numerous ledges (riffles) and where creeks enter the river. Takeout on river right near Route 625.

Clinch River Float Trips




Brewster
Stony
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Clinch
Hardwood
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Hill
Stanleytown
Mabe
Sunbright
Hortons Summit
Spivey Store
Tito
DUFFIELD
CLINCHPORT
LEE CO.
RUSSELL CO.
SCOTT CO.
Grassy Creek
NICKELSVILLE
Snowflake
Slabtown
GATE CITY
WEBER CITY
Marcem
Bellamy
CLINCH RIVER
VIRGINIA
TENNESSEE
CRAFT MILL BRIDGE
S.B.D. RAILROAD
Carterton
DUNGANNON
CLINCHPORT
VA.
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Family Outdoors

Spike Knuth

The Vital Element

I'm sure we've all heard the expression, "I've only got two hands!" An individual can hold or carry just so much according to the strength and capacity of their hands and arms. They have a limited "carrying capacity." Few people realize that the land, too, has a limited carrying capacity. Ask biologists what the most vital element is in maintaining wildlife populations and they will tell you—proper habitat. Biologists have found that the tendency of all wildlife species is to expand to the carrying capacity of the available habitat.

Many birds and mammals have the ability to reproduce themselves at great rates. Potentially, for example, a deer population can more than double every second year.

Some species—songbirds, rabbits, squirrels, quail and waterfowl—can increase at even greater rates. Quail and rabbits often produce 10 or more young in a single breeding season, and the carrying capacity for those species can be attained quickly—if proper and adequate habitat is available.

The higher the reproductive rate of the species, however, the higher is its natural mortality. Animals that produce many young have short life spans and lose most of their young in the first year. In other, larger species such as the black bear—which rarely breed until several years of age, then give birth only every other year—fewer young are produced and the rate of increase is slower. Natural physical law seems to compensate by endowing slow producers with longer lives.

Obviously, when a population of a particular species begins to multiply, it will reach a saturation point. This is what biologists refer to as maximum carrying capacity. Each piece of land has a limit of the number of creatures of any species that it can support. In definition, it is "the capability of an area to provide a species with food, water, shelter and various other needs in a given season." This is habitat.

Many migratory birds occupy and need different types of seasonal habitats separated by hundreds and often thousands of miles. Waterfowl that winter in the Chesapeake Bay must fly to Canada to breed, but they need protective, food-producing marshes and waters in between where they can rest and strengthen themselves on their long journey. If their breeding marshes and potholes have been destroyed, where will they nest? If their wintering marshes and bays are silted and polluted so they don't produce the underwater vegetation that ducks rely on for food, how can the birds be rested and in full strength when they go back North to breed? According to the National Wildlife Federation, "scientists estimate that more than 50 percent of the wetlands have been destroyed since the arrival of European settlers. Recent estimates put the current loss at between 300,000 and 450,000 acres per year."

Some large mammals, like the cougar, need wide areas of 100 miles or more—undisturbed by humans—to range in. Such areas simply don't exist over most of the country anymore. Smaller mammals like shrews or chipmunks may live out their lives in one small corner of a field, yard or woodlot. The variety of habitat needs of every species and sub-species is seemingly unending.

Did you ever wonder what happens to the wildlife that lived on the land that was turned into a shopping center, subdivision, industrial complex or highway? Whenever local conditions change, the species composition of local wildlife changes too. Some species may be eliminated, others will decline and still others will increase. If changes remove any of its essential habitat requirements, a species cannot continue to live in the area. If habitat of the kind it needs is reduced to remnants, to isolated pockets of land, the species in question becomes endangered. If it is eliminated everywhere, the animals become extinct. In the absence of adequate habitat, protection of individual animals is meaningless in terms of perpetuating wild populations.

If a row of houses were destroyed on one side of a streeet, could those people just move in with the people across the street? This is what we often force our wild creatures to try to do. Once habitat is removed—drastically altered or destroyed—that land is taken out of wildlife production. Habitat—food, shelter, water and space—the needs of all life, is the vital element. Up until now we, as a nation, have been paying lip service to protecting our environment. We've been "straining at gnats and swallowing camels," treating effects and not wanting to face and treat causes. Unless we begin to get serious and commit ourselves to protecting our habitat—our environment—we will have no wildlife in the future, whether we hunt them or not. □

Letters

Highway Gardening

I enjoyed reading Nancy Hugo's article on wildflower gardening in your May 1988 issue. While I'm glad to learn that there is increasing interest in developing wildflower and wildlife gardens in our state's public areas, where they are really needed is along our interstate highways.

I was appalled last year to see state-owned tank trucks spraying thousands of gallons of herbicides along Interstate 81 in Washington and Smyth counties. Who says that the land surrounding these roads has to look like a golf course? Our state highway maintenance budget has major allocations for mowing and weed control. A planned shift to wildflowers would reduce the mowing costs and help to shift more funds to the maintenance of road beds and bridges.

The April 1988 issue of *National Geographic* magazine described a similar program in Texas. It's saved the state money, been great for wildlife and helped to yield a bumper crop of tourists (and tourist dollars) who come to admire the flowers along the Texas interstates. Why not Virginia?

Edward B. Morgan
Abingdon

The Sportsman's View

Today I write this letter, troubled that because I love to hunt and fish, I have become a misfit and some kind of monster in this modern age.

When I talk about my hunting experiences to others, I always find myself on the defensive, having to explain why I like to kill defenseless birds and animals. It seems the Bambi syndrome is the prevailing mood of the general public.

I, for one, believe it's about time for the serious sportsman to help change this mood. We should band together and hire a public relations firm to improve our image. I know we would all contribute to this worthwhile endeavor.

The responsible sportsman hunter understands why we hunt and fish; we must convey this message to our non-hunting fellow citizens—before it's too late.

James T. Oyler
Fredericksburg

While reading the letter cancelling her subscription to *Virginia Wildlife* in your June, 1988 edition, I realized that several of Kay Glymph's comments sounded very familiar to me. As a life-long hunter and fisherman, I have often been chastised for my participation in these sports. Your answer to her and your editorial (Editor's Page) of that issue addressed most of her concerns.

I believe, however, that one of the more interesting is the fact that she walks our fields often but has never seen a wild turkey. Many people experience the same results, but I believe it is because they do not approach their walks with the goal of seeing wildlife. Although I have seen many turkeys crossing the road, a few in people's yards, along the Blue Ridge Parkway, etc., it is also true that in order to see wildlife, one can improve the odds by adopting the habits of hunters. Rising early, hiking to the tops of ridges and sitting quietly for hours in turkey habitat may not guarantee a sighting, but will certainly improve the chances. Believe me, the turkeys are really there. At the right time of the year, gangs of 20-50 birds can be encountered and are not uncommon in prime habitat. This past fall, in about 10 trips into the woods, I saw at least 60-80 birds. I was fortunate enough to kill one of them, but my success was guaranteed without the kill because of the sheer excitement of viewing these magnificent birds.

In closing, I would add that it is a shame, and I think her loss, that Ms. Glymph is cancelling her subscription. If she were to scan your articles for turkey facts, knowledge and lore, she could probably succeed in her desire to view those truly breath-taking sights that hunters love so deeply.

Tom Maynard
Staffordsville

In the past several issues subscribers have complained about the substance and purpose of *Virginia Wildlife* and each letter would appear to have been written by non-hunters. I have been reading *Virginia Wildlife* for over 15 years and in that period I have noticed its substance change in an attempt to serve everyone. (In the past there weren't songbird or salamander articles), yet the sportsmen of Virginia have not threatened to cancel subscriptions or condemned you for using the space to fill the interest of groups other than hunters. As a group, sportsmen must constantly justify and explain why they enjoy their particular interest, simply because the non-hunters refuse to accept the facts of nature! Wildlife is a renewable resource, it can not be stockpiled or preserved.

Most non-hunters "attempt" to save our forest land from timber cutters—yet timber is a renewable resource that can't be stockpiled either, yet they

Letters

refuse to listen to trained personnel about long term programs in wildlife and foresty management.

I personally prefer more hunting articles, but I also realize songbirds, plants and insects contribute to the ecosystem just as much as the furbearers and big game, and I enjoy reading about them also. One person complained that projects (habitat restoration, etc.) were conducted to supply more animals to hunt, but many non-hunters fail to realize that non-game species benefit from these projects also.

If we ever succumb to their pressure it will be the demise of all wildlife, because to over protect will surely lead to destruction.

Roy Yowell
Middlebrook

I really believed, in this day and age, that we were beyond that same old argument: the mean ole murdering hunter versus the "true nature lover." I can see from the recent letters that I am wrong.

The hunters I know love nature more than anyone else. They understand its beauties and its dangers. They understand the ecology and the environment. They spend their time, money, and efforts to protect and preserve the forests, the rivers, and the wildlife, both game and nongame species. They spend hours upon hours, days upon days, practicing in order to make a clean kill. They will spend days tracking a wounded animal so that it will not suffer. They use what they kill; it is not wasted. Often, the time spent in the outdoors and in the hunt is more important than the kill, and "the one that got away" appreciated as much as the one that didn't.

They know and understand the forest and its animals intimately. They know every sight, every small sound. They know if animal populations are declining or if there is enough food for the wildlife. They know what is right and what is wrong, and if they find a wrong, they know how to make it right and will do so. They support game protection acts, limits on kills, and nongame species.

Yes, I know there are those who shoot anything that moves, game or nongame, legal or illegal. They don't care about wounding an animal or a fair hunt. They don't care about limits or game laws. They are a menace to nature, to society, and to us all. They are despised by real hunters.

I also know of the "true nature lovers" who never set foot in a forest, never enjoy a river, and get furious because nature isn't coming to them, popping up in their backyard. They expect nature to enter their habitat, instead of spending the time and effort it takes to enter nature. They ignore the facts and figures and dismiss all hunters as macho, redneck jerks. I don't see much difference in *these* "true nature lovers" and the irresponsible hunters they condemn.

The true nature lover, the real one, is as the true hunter—informed, knowledgeable, and open minded. They contribute time, effort, and money. They know and understand and enjoy that of which they speak. And frequently, the true nature lover and the true hunter are one and the same.

But there are those who do not hunt. I am one of these. I could not kill an animal unless it were suffering and in great pain. But I realize that the true nature lover and the hunter are allies, not enemies. We are fighting for the same causes. We are on the same side. What is more important—the argument between true nature lovers and hunters, or the protection and preservation of the forests, the rivers, and the wildlife? I think a *real* true nature lover and a *real* hunter will be able to answer that question. Maybe we won't be able to agree on everything. Who does? But can't we put our differences aside to save what is important to both of us?

Tamra Edwards
Wise

The Lighter Side

The enclosed was written by my 11-year-old son, Billy, who has been hunting on Virginia Game Management Areas with his father since he was six years old. In all this time their expeditions have been fruitless in terms of hunting but invaluable in safe firearms education, responsibility, exercise and wildlife observation and appreciation. Of course, there is also the extra special father-son relationship; tramping together through the hills and valleys, noting new spots for fishing come summer and reminiscing about those brisk mornings and mountain-top snow flurries while fishing at the hot edge of a buzzing July pond.

The entire family, (two grandparents, two parents and two kids!) hunters and non-hunters alike, are avid readers of your beautiful magazine and I was sure you would enjoy Billy's "Recipe." I do have one small request: please let me know the secret (there *must* be one) of getting an 11-year-old up and out to school with the same enthusiasm he takes to the wilderness. And, isn't there some relationship between keeping one's favorite rifle clean and one's bedroom?

Mary S. Clark
Alexandria

Recipe for Dad's Homemade Deer Hunter
G.R. Thompson WMA
(for 0° Farenheit and below)

2 pr. socks
  1 cotton, 1 wool
1 Duofold top and bottom
1 quilt flannel shirt
1 pr. Cargo pants
1 pr. L.L. Bean Ballard Cloth (wool) pants
1 sweater
1 pr. Camo overalls
1 pr. insulated boots
1 blaze orange wool hat

Broil for six hours on top of any mountain with high-powered rifle. Then freeze!

Habitat

Nancy Hugo

Cardinal Flower

There's a wonderful lesson to be learned from the cardinal flower about what planting for wildlife requires. It has to do with studying habitat to learn what plants and animals need.

The cardinal flower *(Lobelia cardinalis)* is one of our most beautiful native wildflowers and one of the most prized by wildlife gardeners. It's rich in nectar and almost guaranteed to attract hummingbirds. Not only are hummingbirds attracted to its brilliant red color, but the shape of the flower is perfectly suited to them. Bumblebees have trouble hanging onto the cardinal flower's weak split lower lip, but hummingbirds can hover in midair as they probe the long flower tube with their bills and draw nectar up their hollow tongues through capillary action.

Hummingbirds are also the cardinal flower's chief pollinators, although they perform the service inadvertently. A long tube formed of fused stamens reaches out beyond the corolla of the cardinal flower, and its anthers are loaded with pollen. They're perfectly placed to baptize the heads of hummingbirds who then transfer the pollen as they hover.

Cardinal flowers are easy to grow—as long as you pay attention to the habitat they require. Where do cardinal flowers grow in the wild? They grow along stream banks, in wet meadows, and in other moist situations. Do you have such a spot in your yard? I searched my own dry yard for a long time before I realized the only spot that resembled cardinal flower habitat was the spot next to the downspout on the north side of the house. There, where the soil stays pretty constantly moist, I planted my cardinal flowers and there they have thrived.

Rich soil, light shade, and moisture are the keys to cardinal flower habitat.

photo by Rob Simpson

It also pays to remember that where they grow on stream banks in the wild, the plants are washed free of leaf litter, so leaf litter shouldn't be allowed to cover them in the winter. According to wildflower expert Harry Phillips, the new offshoots of the parent plant take advantage of the sun shining through the bare limbs of deciduous trees to actively produce food all winter, so they shouldn't be smothered in mulch. Also remember the plants that had four-foot stalks of gorgeous red flowers in August will be nothing but a mass of mushy basal leaves by the next April. Don't give up on them; they'll be putting out new growth by May.

Cardinal flowers are available as plants from Native Gardens (Route 1, Box 494, Greenback, TN 37742), or you can grow them from seed. To collect seeds from the parent plant, watch the round seed capsules until they begin to break open (usually around October). The ripe seeds will be brown. You can sow them immediately or wait until late winter. Believe it or not, tiny as they are, they're almost all going to germinate, so sow them thinly. They need to be kept constantly moist, and it's hard to water them from the top without washing them overboard. I sowed mine in a clay pot with a hole in the bottom and put the pot in a shallow birdbath where it could take up water constantly from the bottom. Worked like a charm.

There are other nectar-rich plants that also enjoy wet habitats, so if you have large areas that stay moist most of the year, you might consider planting some of them. Buttonbush, jewelweed, joe-pye weed, and swamp milkweed are all choice nectar plants which enjoy conditions similar to those enjoyed by cardinal flowers. Together they will transform a wet spot of ground into a haven for hummingbirds and other nectar seekers. □

Etc.

"First of State" Virginia National Forest Stamp

"First of State" Virginia Waterfowl Stamp

Prints Still Available

The "First of State" Virginia National Forest stamp/print and the "First of State" Virginia Waterfowl stamp/print are still available at local art galleries throughout the state. The Virginia Forest stamp/print features Durant Ball's "Alerted Whitetail Buck," while the Virginia waterfowl stamp/print depicts a pair of mallards painted by Virginia artist Ron Louque.

The voluntary waterfowl stamp is available for $5 from Game Department license agents, and the proceeds from the stamp will be used for the acquisition and development of waterfowl habitat in the state. The forest stamp, which is required for hunting and fishing on national forest lands, is available for $3.00 from Game Department license agents, and the stamp proceeds will continue to sustain the cooperative fisheries and wildlife management projects of the George Washington and Jefferson National Forests by the Forest Service and the Game Department.

The sale of each fine art print also will benefit both programs, however, *neither print is available from Game Department or Forest Service offices.* Instead, contact your local art gallery or write to Sport 'en Art/Midwest Marketing, R.R. 3, Sullivan, IL 61951. □

Wanted: Hunting and Fishing Guides

The Game Department is in the process of compiling a list of hunting and fishing guides in the state. If you are a guide, and would like to be represented on this list, please send your name, address, telephone number and a description of your services (including prices) to: Jeff Curtis, Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, P.O. Box 11104, Richmond, VA 23230-1104.

Use Your P.H.O.N.E.!

The Department of Game and Inland Fisheries operates a toll-free number for citizens to report game, fish, and boating law violations. Dial 1-800-237-5712 anytime, day or night.

Southern Fox Squirrel Discovered

Game Department biologists recently recovered a rare southern fox squirrel in Amelia County. A subspecies of the eastern fox squirrel, the southern fox squirrel, with its white face, black head and reddish tail, was thought to occur only rarely in Surry County, and was considered extirpated elsewhere in Virginia.

Larger, slower, and spending more time on the ground than its smaller gray squirrel cousins, southern fox squirrels inhabit mature oak forests and adjacent farm woodlots, and until this recent discovery, had been found only in Surry County.

The Game Department would appreciate any reports of southern fox squirrels, to help substantiate the existence of additional populations that might be living in the southern piedmont and southeast Virginia.

Safety

Ramp Etiquette

There was a lot of screaming and yelling and even threats of physical violence. It got my attention. The location of all the noise was a launching ramp for small boats on a Virginia lake. The problem was that boat operators out on the water could see that their boat trailers were on the ramp ready to be loaded, but they were being blocked by other boats which had nosed up to the ramps. How did that situation get so fouled up? Here's how:

Some people work as a team. One person is unloaded from the boat to get his truck and trailer in the line of vehicles and trailers inching toward the launching ramps, while the boat continues to circle near the ramp, waiting. Other boat operators, however, do not use a team member to get the tow-vehicle. They simply run their boats right up close to the ramp, jump out and go for their vehicles, and get into the line of vehicles with trailers heading toward the launching ramps. As a result, we find that the drivers whose boats are first in line at the ramps are often behind the drivers whose boats are out in the water circling around. So, the drivers who back their trailers down to recover their boats find that between them and the boats they are ready to pick up, are boats whose trailers are still back in line.

Sounds complicated, but the solution is simple. No boat should be pulled up into the loading position until its trailer is in the water ready to receive it. Once it is on the trailer, it should be pulled far enough away so there is no interference with ramp activity or vehicle parking. Then, the boat can be readied for its road trip back home.

Conversely, when a boat is to be launched, pre-launching preparation should take place a reasonable distance from ramp activity. The pre-launch routine should include removal of covers, tie-downs and extra bow-eye safety chains from the boat and insertion of the drain plug. Motor or outdrive lashing should be removed from the motor and the motor lowered to running position. Gasoline lines and connections and battery connections should be checked. Engine compartments should be checked for fuel odors. All items needed for the trip should be unloaded from the vehicle into the boat. Trailer lights should be unplugged from the tow-vehicle in preparation for dunking. All safety items should be checked, including a count of personal flotation devices to insure one for each occupant.

When all preparations are complete, the boat should be launched expeditiously, and cleared from the ramp area so that others will not be delayed while the trailer and tow-vehicle are being parked.

It's all simply called consideration.—*William Antozzi, Boating Safety Officer*

Hunter Education Courses

An approved 10-hour hunter education course is required of all new hunters and those 12-15 years of age in order to purchase a 1988 hunting license. The Game Department and its hunter education volunteer instructors are conducting courses throughout the state this fall. As of our press date, free hunter education courses have been scheduled in the following areas during the month of October: Albemarle, Alleghany, Augusta, Bath, Bedford, Buchanan, Clarke, Dickenson, Fairfax, Franklin, Frederick, Greene, Highland, Isle of Wight, Lunenburg, Nelson, Orange, Page, Patrick, Rockbridge, Rockingham, Russell, Shenandoah, Sussex, Tazewell and Wythe, and the Cities of Norfolk, Richmond, and Virginia Beach.

Call your local game warden for details on courses in your area, or contact the Game Department at (804) 367-1000.

Junior Hunter Education Team Wins National Title

Virginia's junior hunter education championship team won the 1988 National Rifle Association North American Hunter Education Championship at Fort Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvannia. Testing the skills of young hunters in rifle and shotgun marksmanship, archery, wildlife identification, woodsmanship, hunter responsibility and safety, the junior team from Nottoway County captured the title amidst a field of tough competitors, with hunters hailing from all across the U.S. and Canada.

The Nottoway team, under the coaching of Larry Cary, won first place in both shotgun and the written examination, and placed second in the rifle and archery events. Team member Rusty Leslie also was recognized as the overall individual junior champion, followed by fellow team member George Felts who came in third. Congratulations to all for a stunning performance. These are exemplary hunters, and we are proud that they are Virginians to boot!

Virginia's Wildlife

The Bobcat

by
John Pagels
photo by
Kevin Shank

The bobcat crouches in a laurel patch as a woodchuck scurries to its burrow. Suddenly, a pounce, and a powerful forelimb and paw reach the woodchuck's back a moment before the cat's canines pierce the neck and spinal cord. A troubling scene to some, but one that with many different characters is repeated over and over among our native wildlife species. Most times now, however, the feline predator is the domestic cat, not the bobcat. Although both the bobcat and the domestic cat sometime stalk their unaware prey, and both sometimes patiently wait at a likely spot, only one is native to Virginia.

The bobcat, *Felis rufus*, ranges from southern Canada through the United States into Mexico. In most of Canada and to the north, it is replaced by its close, bobtailed but larger relative, the lynx, *Felis lynx*, a species also found in northern Europe and Asia. In Virginia, the bobcat is relatively common in many areas, but rare to absent in portions of the Coastal Plain and Piedmont. In the 1986-1987 season, two or more bobcats were harvested in 55 Virginia counties. The words "relatively common" are the key, for as is the typical case with large predators anywhere (and university presidents in Massachusetts), even where abundant, the numbers are small.

Larger than most domestic cats, bobcats weigh from 10 to 25 pounds, more often something between, and are sexually dimorphic; that is, males are about a third larger and heavier than females. There are Virginia records of 30 pounds to slightly more, but occasional reports of even larger specimens usually can't be documented. Regardless, a 24-pound bobcat may not seem particularly large until we are reminded that a large male red fox weights about half that much. And pound for pound, there are probably very few mammals better known for their savage feats and hence their other common name, wildcat, or even better, in French Canadian, "chat sauvage."

Indeed, the bobcat does occasionally take large prey that requires great strength, agility, and killing ability. In Virginia, one of those is the adult white-tailed deer, and in the West, male pronghorns. Many of the more dramatic tales are generated by hunters who have seen or heard what they can do to their dogs, or by trappers who perhaps got too close to the animal one time. Like most cats, the bobcat has retractile claws, claws which, kept sharp, help in climbing and in capturing prey, and are also very effective defensive tools. In his book *The Bobcat of North America*, Stanley P. Young noted that "attempting to remove a live adult bobcat from a trap is a never-to-be-forgotten experience."

Whether in mountains or swampland, the bobcat is never far from good cover, especially briars, vines and thickets of various kinds. There are no bobcats in extensively cleared areas—areas where pasture and croplands prevail—or in towns, but human activity and dwellings do not seem to have too great a negative impact on the animal, providing that suitable habitat is available. Even then, however, the bobcat is rarely observed because of its secretiveness.

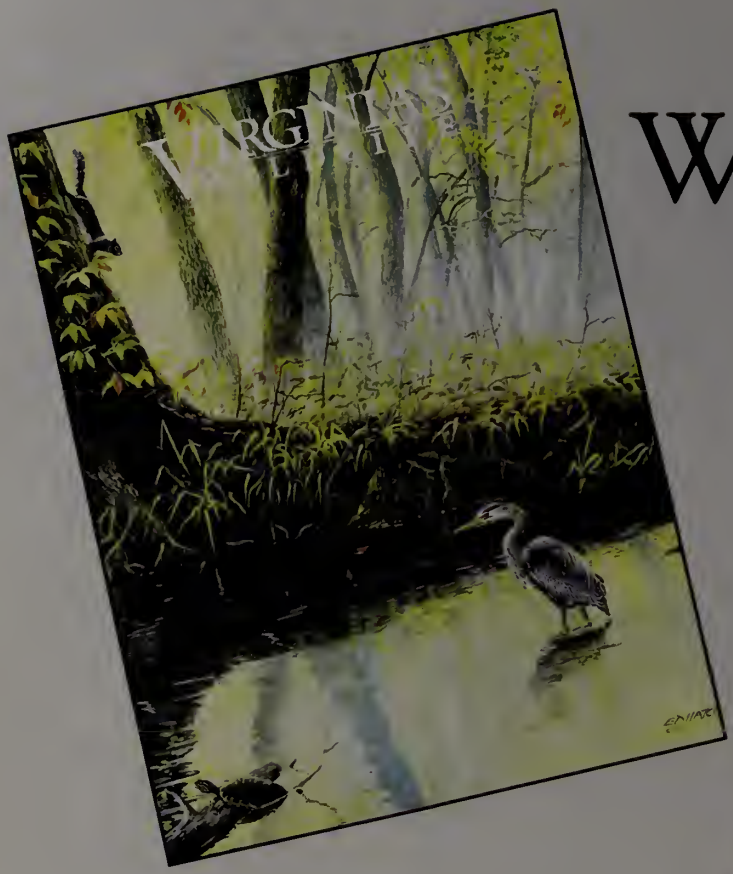
Where suitable habitat exists, older adults of both sexes usually establish territories within prime habitat areas. The territories are managed both by scent-marking with urine and other material as well as visual cues. Dispersing young and sexually immature individuals apparently form "floating" populations that are tolerated by the territorial adults.

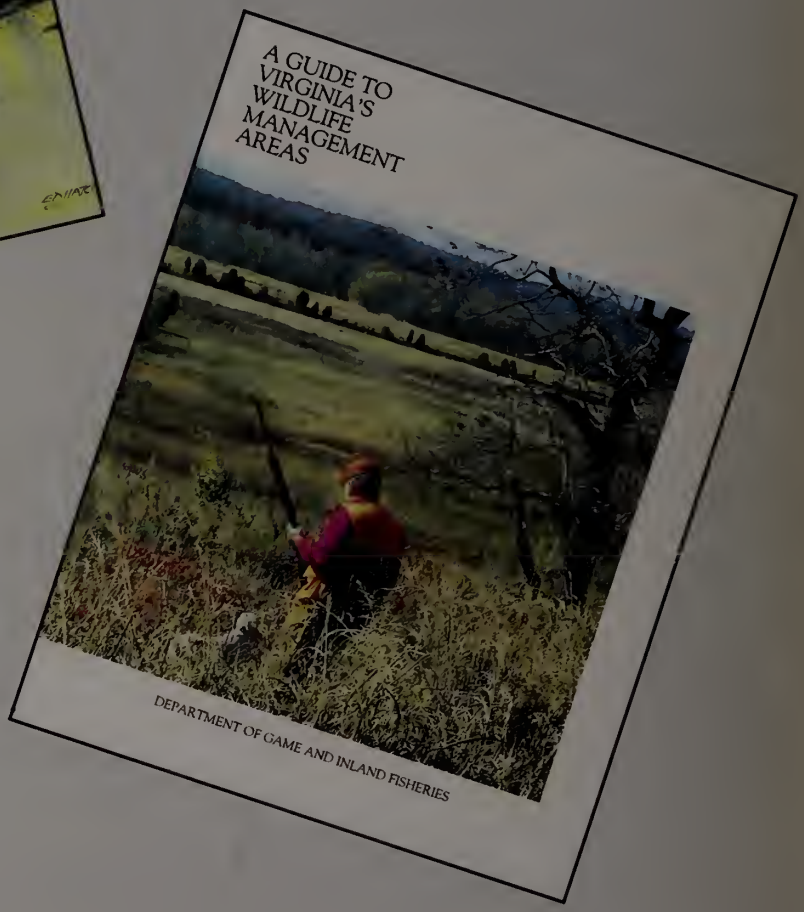
Bobcats are generally thought to have a single litter per year, but there is some evidence that if a litter is lost early in the reproductive season, the female may again cycle and become pregnant. Although the reproductive season may be extensive, breeding usually takes place in late winter and "bobkittens" are born after a gestation period of about 62 days. Fur of newborn kittens is slightly spotted and their facial markings are distinct. The eyes open at about 10 days. The average litter size is two, but both productivity and mortality of kittens is strongly related to prey populations—whether deer, cottontail, chipmunk or deer mouse.

This is yet another reminder that Virginia's wildlife, predator and prey alike, is highly dependent on the availability of suitable habitat. And today, the presence of suitable habitat most often depends on us. □

John Pagels is a mammalogist at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Wrap One Up





and put it under your own Christmas tree—when you buy 10 or more subscriptions to *Virginia Wildlife* for your friends at the unbeatable, unbelievable low price of 4 bucks a year. To top it all off, you and your friends will receive the quarterly newspaper, *Virginia Sportsman* free. How's that for some Christmas cheer?

(Use the order form in the magazine, and do it now, because the offer expires January 1, 1989.)